

THE FRACKING LOOPHOLE • PARAPSYCHOLOGY TODAY

OCTOBER 2009

IN THESE TIMES

David Sirota
on **Madmen 2.0**

Michelle Obama,
how does your
garden **grow**?

TAKING BACK RURAL AMERICA



PLUS:

James William Gibson on the
politics of enchantment

mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



74,000 number of soldiers returning from Iraq between 2003 and 2004 who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

38 percent of male soldiers who have been sexually harassed while on duty

2,100 number of U.S. Army soldiers who tried to commit suicide in 2007

20 percent of soldiers filing for divorce since 2001

“

And I say, as I have before, if health insurance is good enough for the President, the Vice President, the Congress of the United States, then it's good enough for you and every family in America.

”

—SEN. EDWARD M. KENNEDY, DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION, 1980

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



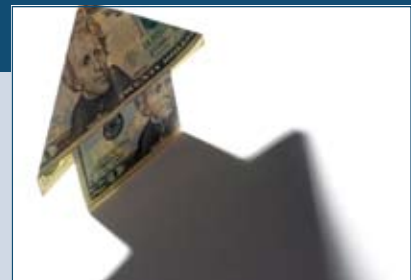
QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

Since James B. Lockhart III was appointed in 2006, by childhood friend and Yale frat brother George W. Bush, he has directed the Federal Housing Finance Agency, the regulator of Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and the Federal Home Loan Banks. When the housing market went bust, his agency took over those government enterprises, which own or guarantee more than half of the nation's mortgages.

THE QUO:

In August, Lockhart announced that he was stepping down. Having weathered the housing crisis, his hard work seems to have paid off. According to billionaire investor William L. Ross, Lockhart's "extensive government experience, deep knowledge of the U.S. mortgage markets and strong background in public/private finance" makes him exceptionally qualified to be vice-chairman at his company, WL



Ross & Co. Lockhart's new employer is an affiliate of Invesco, one of the nine financial firms selected to participate in a program to buy banks' faulty mortgage-related investments.

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BY JAMES WILLIAM GIBSON

COVER

Dennis Snow made the letters out of mahogany plywood and screwed them onto the old electric sign in front of his woodworking shop (a one-time 1940s road house) on U.S. Highway 12, two miles east of Three Oaks, Mich.

(Photo by Claudia Parish)

editorial

Rural America Needs You

FIFTY YEARS AGO, when I grew up in a small Iowa town, diversified family farms were the norm, local economies were thriving and the middle class was expanding. Then a new weapon was launched in the Cold War—cheap food—and the landscape of my youth was plowed under.

The horrors of an industrialized food system already were well-known, but with Richard Nixon in the White House, “feeding the world” became our national mantra and farmers famously were told to “get big or get out.” Land values rose, credit flowed, and neighbors were bought out or squeezed out of the growing global economy.

Agribusinesses like Archer Daniels Midland, John Deere and Cargill were quick to seize on this new opportunity, developing a sophisticated lobbying arm with a firm grip on federal policy. Massive producers took over enormous tracts of land across the United States and around the world, requiring a new generation of outsized tractors and tons of chemicals for their vast commercial operations.

But this system of artificially high land values, enforced low prices and unmanageable debt levels was unsustainable, its collapse inevitable. By the mid-1980s, bankruptcies, foreclosures and suicides became commonplace as farmers were forced off land that often had been in their families for generations. Small-business owners who counted on local producers for their bread and butter also began disappearing, shuttering Main Streets across the Midwest.

It was in this political crucible that the League of Rural Voters (www.leagueof-ruralvoters.org) was formed. Building on the longstanding progressive traditions of states like Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin, family-farm advocates began organizing and the effect was immediate: leaders like Tom Harkin were

elected to the U.S. Senate. But operating in the shadows was right-wing radio, buttressed by the hate-filled messages of their allies on the ground. And its power to sway opinion grew as the rural economy continued in freefall and national Democratic Party leaders largely abandoned rural states for concentrated votes in urban and coastal regions.

Despite our many challenges, ideas planted decades ago are taking root as never before. Growing among mainstream consumers is a deep understanding that corporate agriculture threatens their health and our nation. This profound linkage of urban and rural offers progressives an opportunity to fundamentally alter our political landscape.

That work is under way. In “Uniting, One County at a Time,” Mike Edera and Marcy Westerling share their experiences building a powerful, community-based network of progressive organizations in rural Oregon to foster human dignity and combat right-wing extremism. In “Building the Left in Harbor Country,” Jim Vopat details how progressives in rural Michigan have grown and sustained a grassroots movement to affect local politics and elections. And the League of Rural Voters continues its work, reaching out to farmers, ranchers and small-town residents nationwide to combat the fear and confusion propagated by the right.

Good stewardship of this land demands that progressives in America align themselves with those in small towns and rural communities as we work for change. For decades, rural states have been regarded as little more than flyover country in the broad political calculus. The result was catastrophic, not just for the 50 million of us who call such places home, but for this great truth: whether we live in cities or the suburbs, the exurbs or the country—we’re all interconnected.

—Niel Ritchie

IN THESE TIMES

“With liberty and justice for all...”

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contributors

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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MIKE EDERA AND MARCY WESTERLING, a longtime couple in politics and life, live in Scappoose, Ore. They wrote the first chapter of the 2008 book *Lessons from the Field: Organizing in Rural Communities*. Edera is a landscaper by day, 12-month-a-year food producer, a gun enthusiast and a community organizer in his remaining hours. Westerling founded the Rural Organizing Project in 1992. Currently a fellow at the Open Society

Institute, she is mapping rural progressive infrastructure in four states as a first step for identifying allies for social-change organizing.



POLLY HOWELLS, a member of the *In These Times* Publishing Consortium, has been a psychotherapist in Brooklyn for 38 years. She runs workshops for women and is a facilitator of The Pachamama Alliance's "Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream" symposium. For more information, visit www.pachamama.org.



JIM VOPAT and his partner Bob Miller, founding members of Harbor Country Progress, live in Three Oaks, Mich. Vopat, the author of five books including *Writing Circles: Kids Revolutionize Workshop* (Heinemann, 2009), founded and co-directs the Milwaukee Writing Project.

JAMES FLAMMING, a member of the *In These Times* Board of Editors, lives in Elk Grove Village, Ill. A journalist, he runs the website www.tirekick.org.

JAMES WILLIAM GIBSON, a sociologist at California State University, Long Beach, also wrote *Warrior Dreams: Paramilitary Culture in Post-Vietnam America* (1994) and *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (1986).

LEONARD C. GOODMAN, a member of the *In These Times* Publishing Consortium, is a Chicago criminal defense attorney and adjunct professor at DePaul University Law School.

ROBIN PETERSON, an *In These Times* intern and student at the University of Chicago, is the managing editor of the *Chicago Weekly*, a South Side paper.

NIEL RITCHIE is the executive director of the League of Rural Voters, www.leagueofruralvoters.org.

FATIMA SHAIK is a writer and New Orleans native. Her next book is based on the journals of the Societe d'Economie et d'Assistance Mutuelle.



The work of these writers is supported by the Puffin Foundation First Amendment Fund.

letters



Support Zelaya

The military coup that overthrew Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, was a setback for democracy ("The Honduran Connection," September 2009). I sincerely hope that the United States was not involved in anyway. However, considering the close relationship between the U.S. and Honduran militaries, it is hard to believe that the Honduran army moved against Zelaya without notifying U.S. military officials.

The Obama Administration needs to make clear its support for the legitimacy of Honduras's elected president by calling for the unconditional reinstatement of Zelaya. To hasten the resumption of democratic order, the U.S. should immediately suspend all non-humanitarian assistance to Honduras.

*Andrew C. Mills
Lower Gwynedd, Pa.*

Insurance, MD

David Moberg's quest to find out "Who's Got The Power" (September 2009) will not be easily achieved. Insur-

ance companies have have managed, without earning and possessing any medical degree, to dictate terms and conditions to those so qualified. Frequently, doctors have to disregard their years of training and the Hippocratic Oath to toe the policy line set by their "masters." To preserve their dignity, most doctors would love to disassociate themselves and strike out on their own—but can they really do so without tort reform? One claim and they can be wiped out. Right now it seems the insurance companies have "got the power."

*G.M. Chandu
New York*

He's black, he's white

In "The 'Post-Racial' President" (September 2009), Salim Muwakkil writes, "Obama is classified as black solely because he shares the DNA of his Kenyan father." I disagree. Obama is in large part classified as black because he identifies himself as black. According to his DNA, he could have rightfully identified himself as biracial—as black and white—and questioned both our society's system of racial classification and the whole notion of race, but he chose not to. In his book *Dreams From My Father* and his speeches, Obama says that since society sees him as a black man, he identifies himself as a black man. Muwakkil makes it seem as if Obama is a helpless victim of racial pigeonholing "solely because" of his father's DNA. He is not. He chose to go along with the

system. By identifying himself as black, Obama aided and abetted his being classified as black.

*Royce Templeton
Parkton, Md.*

Where the sidewalk vends

We New Yorkers also reuse many things we find on the sidewalk ("The Big Green Apple" by Will Boisvert, Sep-

tember). It's common to find a computer desk, or a nice chair, or just about anything that people get tired of and want to throw away or leave for someone to take. There are also plenty of things that you can find on a New York sidewalk and fix up like new.

We call these reusable objects "sidewalk specials."

*Jeff Haight
Upper West Side, New York*

INTHESETIMES.COM

- Well before the current recession began, America's population growth outpaced job creation. Could a federal jobs program offer a permanent solution? A special Web-only feature will offer a far-reaching plan to tackle unemployment on September 18.
- James Foley reports from Afghanistan on the aftermath of the country's historic and controversial national election held in August.
- Noam Chomsky details continuing U.S. efforts to militarize Latin America in his monthly Web-only column.
- Weekday round-ups of the best reporting from independent media appear on our staff blog, The ITT List.



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- A look at campaigns to guarantee U.S. workers paid sick days—and by doing so protect the country from swine flu during this fall's flu season.
- David Moberg on what severe income inequality means for America's future.
- Roger Bybee on the "Top 10 Lessons from the Health-care Reform War."

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Capitalist Health Insurance for All



HERE'S WHAT CORPORATIONS know, but don't want you to find out: Private insurance is for suckers.

Armies of healthcare industry flacks, lobbyists and bought-and-paid-for legislators rant that nonprofit, public insurance is a slippery slope to socialist hell, will limit your choice of physicians to Doc Watson and Dr. Kevorkian, and bankrupt the coun-

try. But, in fact, most U.S. Fortune 500 companies wouldn't touch private insurance with a 10-foot colonoscope.

When they need to insure their financial health against fire, terrorism, and liability lawsuits sparked by defective products and polluting factories that kill people, they don't call State Farm. Instead, corporations routinely insure themselves by creating a "captive" insurance company as a wholly-owned subsidiary.

"The parent company is insuring its own risk," says Sandy Bigglestone, of Vermont's Captive Insurance division.

But when we the people need health insurance against the high cost of staying alive, we, or our employers, pay private insurers—corporations that are more devoted to protecting their profits than our health. The premiums we pay go not only for our pills and treatments, but also for lobbyists (on whom the health insurance industry currently spends \$1.4 million per day for the U.S. Congress alone), campaign contributions, stratospheric executive salaries, private jets, lawyers hired to fight legitimate claims, and, of course, profits.

Captive insurance cuts costs, first, by saving all the money an outside private insurer would take as profit. How much? When it comes to health insurance companies, it's very hard to know. That is why Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.V.) has demanded that the top health insurers reveal what portion of premiums goes to profits versus patient care. But whatever the figure, the profits are big and getting bigger. By various reports, at 10 of the country's largest publicly traded health insurance companies, profits rose 428 percent from 2000 to 2007—from \$2.4 to \$12.9 billion. Helping fund that jump were our premiums, which rose from 1.5 percent of G.D.P. in 1970 to 5.5 percent in 2007. The average family with employer-sponsored insurance now pays twice what it did in 1999, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Many captives are domiciled in Bermuda and the Cayman Islands, making them one-stop tropical shops for tax shelters and self-insurance.

Captives also save administrative costs, since they have "an incentive to do business efficiently" because "it's eventually coming out of the same pockets," Dennis Harwick, president of the Captive Insurance Companies Association, told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. On top of that, captive insurance companies rake in tax breaks by deducting from their profits the money they are required to reserve for payout—even if they never have to pay it out.

"What!" you say. "By using captives, parent companies undercut the free enterprise system and deprive businesses of the right to compete in the market. That sounds like socialism!"—except that when corporations do it, no one screams that Sweden is taking over.

We could capture the same sweet deal if we cut out

the middleman and insure ourselves. Single-payer health insurance, or at least, a public option, is the counterpart to captive insurance for us peons who get cancer instead of billion-dollar bonuses and

\$2,000 co-pays for ambulance rides instead of junkets on corporate jets. Under a public option, the government would act as our own wholly owned subsidiary—our nonprofit, low-overhead captive insurer.

Most of the world's captives are domiciled (sounds so homey) in Bermuda and the Cayman Islands, making them one-stop tropical shops for tax shelters and self-insurance. "About 85 percent of the top 50 healthcare systems in the United States have some relationship with the Bermuda market, either through captives domiciled there, or by buying reinsurance for their captives," insurance insider Judy Hart told the trade group, Bermuda Captive Club.

Vermont, home to the most U.S. captives, lists 856 companies that collect (give themselves) \$16 billion in premiums. These include Goldman Sachs, AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Wal-Mart, Archer Daniels Midland, Bank of America, AT&T, and dozens of for- and not-for-profit healthcare-related companies like Wyeth Holdings, Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Coventry Health Care and Humana.

We could do worse than become fellow travelers. Instead of calling public health insurance pull-the-plug-on-granny socialism, we could take a page from the corporate handbook, and call it captive. ■

CONTACT Terry J. Allen at tallen@igc.org

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

Killing Granny with the Laziness Bias



PROGRESSIVES HAVE BEEN wrong—overly idealistic—about the power of communication. Many of us cling to the belief that if you just get all the correct information out and circulate it widely and reasonably, sensible people will listen, reflect and come to see the light. Year in and year out we are proven wrong. While it is often the case that the majority of Americans

do see the light—about the need for healthcare reform, a new energy policy or affordable, high-quality day care—the dominant journalistic practices, especially in broadcast and cable news, dim the light in favor of noise.

Far-right Republicans understand, almost instinctively, this preference for noise. And they appreciate—and know how to cultivate—the greatest bias in electronic journalism right now: the laziness bias.

The laziness bias means you feature sensation over substance, provocative sound bites over investigative reporting, misinformation over fact. Why should news outlets pay attention to anything Sarah Palin says, given that she's a proven ignoramus and no longer a public official? Why do Rush Limbaugh's verbal bombs, all of them deliberately wrong or hateful, circulate through the mainstream media? Because they're shocking. Palin braying about "death panels." Limbaugh, on the occasion of Ted Kennedy's death, asserting the senator had spent his time "sabotaging his own country." Through August, all the noise about "killing granny."

One of the pioneers of this approach was Phyllis Schlafly, who in the late '70s masterminded killing the Equal Rights Amendment, which would have benefited millions of women. In addition to very skillful grassroots organizing at the state legislature level, Schlafly made the ERA about one thing: unisex toilets. Did women really want to be forced to walk by all the guys peeing in urinals to go to the bathroom at a restaurant or highway rest stop? Well, no. At every opportunity, Schlafly raised the specter of same-sex bathrooms—a simultaneously titillating and discomfiting notion—and it worked.

The far right also did this with childcare in the '70s. This was the decade of revolution in family life, as millions of mothers with infants and toddlers entered the work force.

The need for childcare was urgent. Walter Mondale, then a senator from Minnesota, introduced the Child and Family Services Act of 1975, which would have provided federal funds for day-care services, prenatal care, medical care for handicapped kids, and other educational and health services. In short order, mimeographed flyers circulated claiming the bill would force parents to turn their kids over to government-run centers, would mandate "communal forms of upbringing" and, in the coup de grace, would encourage children to sue their parents if they required them to attend Sunday school. At the time, Mondale referred to the campaign as "one of the most distorted and dishonest attacks I have witnessed in my 15 years of public service." That was before the current death panels insanity and, of course, before Fox News.

So here we are again, with the news media providing a platform for all these crazy assertions about how healthcare reform will euthanize us all, while doing precious

little to expose how the current system benefits the few at the expense of many and will bankrupt the country if we don't do something. Again, minority positions are made to look like the majority sentiment, which then affects public opinion, which in turn gives support to those seeking to deep-six true reform.

Here's the story I'd like to see reported. It was proposed by my friend John, who is trying to get a new healthcare plan but can't without paying through the nose because he has one of those dreaded "pre-existing conditions."

The camera would pan across the vacation homes of Steven Wiggins, CEO of Oxford Health Plans (annual salary \$29 million), Wilson Taylor, chairman and CEO of CIGNA Corporation (\$11 million), Joseph Sebastianelli, president of Aetna, Inc. (\$7.3 million) and Leonard Schaeffer, chairman and CEO of WellPoint Health Networks, Inc. (\$7 million). The reporter would identify the owner of each house, list that CEOs' salary, describe how the restrictions in the health insurance policies they sell helped pay for those homes, and then report on what their corporations are doing to derail or water down proposed healthcare legislation.

But then a story like this, and the dozens of others that are needed, would require the media to totally abandon their laziness bias. Better to just show Rush Limbaugh calling healthcare reform a "miniature version of fascism." ■

Minority positions are made to look like majority sentiment. That affects public opinion, which in turn supports those trying to deep-six reform.

LEONARD C. GOODMAN

Sold to the United States for Cash



IN MAY, PRESIDENT Barack Obama began floating the idea that his administration might seek the power to “preventatively detain” terrorism suspects who “are deemed a threat to national security but cannot be tried.” The rationale is: These folks are bad. We can’t tell you how we know this because of national security concerns. So trust us. This is in effect what the Bush administration

told us for more than five years, and it is nonsense.

I am an attorney representing one of the 230 remaining Guantanamo detainees who are subject to this preventative detention. Shawali Khan has been imprisoned at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center for more than six years without charges. Khan is a small man with sad eyes, about 40 years old, who comes from a small farming village near Kandahar, Afghanistan.

When the Americans invaded in October 2001, Khan was living in Kandahar City, selling kerosene and gasoline. On Nov. 13, 2002, he was riding his motorcycle from his home to the market when he was arrested by four Afghan men who work for the corrupt warlord Gul Agha Shirzai, who governed Kandahar province. A short while later, Khan was transferred to the Americans.

Khan was no doubt sold to the United States for a cash bounty. Shortly after the U.S. invasion, the U.S. military littered Afghanistan with leaflets offering bounties of up to \$20,000 cash in exchange for the capture of al Qaeda or Taliban fighters. One leaflet promised: “Enough money to take care of your family, your village, your tribe for the rest of your life.”

Most fifth-graders would understand that offering cash bounties to the people of one of the poorest and most corrupt countries on earth is unlikely to produce reliable information about terrorists. Nevertheless, in a November 2001 press briefing, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld bragged that the bounty leaflets were falling from the Afghan sky “like snowflakes.” More than 90 percent of the Guantanamo detainees were captured by tribal warlords or groups such as the Northern Alliance before being turned over to the Americans.

Khan’s confidential file reveals that, around the time

of his capture, one or more Afghan informants told U.S. intelligence officials in Kandahar that Khan was an active member of a local insurgent group that was plotting to bomb Americans in and around the Kandahar region. The U.S. intelligence officer did not bother to record the informant’s name or whether he was paid a bounty. Nor did he inquire how the informant acquired his information or whether the informant is a credible person or a criminal. Nor did the official attempt to corroborate the allegations against Khan before sending him off to the newly built prison at Guantanamo.

John Bates, a federal judge in Washington, D.C., has reviewed the confidential “evidence” against Khan and declared that all of the allegations against him come from reports containing “multiple levels of hearsay” and that “all of the information contained in the reports could come from a single individual” and that “no source is identified by name.” Nevertheless, Khan

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld bragged that the bounty leaflets were falling from the Afghan sky ‘like snowflakes.’

remains at the Guantanamo Detention Center, along with 230 others. There can be no doubt that Khan, and many or most of his fellow detainees, were sent to Gitmo because U.S. intelligence officials accepted, without question, the unsubstantiated allegations of local warlords and bounty hunters.

During the six-plus years of his captivity, Khan has repeatedly told his interrogators that he is a poor shopkeeper from Kandahar, not a terrorist and not an enemy of the United States. The only other detainee at Guantanamo from the Kandahar region was shown Khan’s photograph. He told his interrogators that Khan “was a shopkeeper who sold gasoline in Kandahar” and was not a terrorist.

Khan can never be tried in a court of law or even in a military tribunal because our government has no evidence against him. It can produce no witnesses, physical evidence, incriminating documents or confessions.

If President Obama goes forward with his plans for preventative detention, U.S. officials will be given the power to choose—either to admit their mistakes, which appear to be so negligent as to rise to the level of crimes, or to bury their mistakes forever under the cloak of national security. No government should be trusted with this kind of power. ■



On August 9 in East Jerusalem, a Palestinian woman flashes the victory sign in front of a house whose Palestinian residents were evicted and where Jewish settlers now live.

Making the Illegal Legal

Israel's Kafkaesque bureaucracy colonizes the occupied West Bank one settlement at a time

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

ON AUGUST 2, 2009, after cordoning off part of the Arab neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, Israeli police evicted two Palestinian families—more than 50 people—from their homes. Jewish settlers immediately moved into the emptied houses. Although Israeli police cited a ruling by the country's Supreme Court to justify the evictions, the Arab families had been living there for more than 50 years. The event attracted the attention of the global media, but it is part of a larger and mostly ignored process.

Five months earlier, on March 1, 2009, it was reported that the Israeli government has plans to build more than 70,000 new housing units in Jewish settlements in the

occupied West Bank. If implemented, the plans could increase the number of settlers in the Palestinian territories by about 300,000—a move that would not only severely undermine the chances of a viable Palestinian state, but also interfere with the everyday lives of Palestinians. A government spokesman dismissed the report, arguing that the preliminary plans were of limited relevance: The actual construction of new homes in the settlements required the approval of the defense minister and prime minister. However, 15,000 of the planned units have already been fully approved. In addition, almost 20,000 of the planned units lie in settlements that are far from the “green line” that separates Israel from the West Bank—in other words

they are located in areas that Israel cannot expect to retain in any future peace deal with the Palestinians.

The conclusion is obvious: While paying lip-service to the two-state solution, Israel is busy creating a situation on the ground that renders a two-state solution de facto impossible. The dream that underlies this politics is best rendered by the wall that separates a settler's town from the Palestinian town on a nearby hill somewhere in the West Bank. The Israeli side of the wall is painted with the image of the countryside beyond the wall—but without the Palestinian town, depicting just nature, with grass and trees. Is this not ethnic cleansing at its purest, imagining the outside beyond the wall as it should be—empty, virginal, waiting to be settled?

When purportedly peace-loving Israeli liberals present their conflict with Palestinians in neutral “symmetrical” terms, admitting that there are extremists on both sides who reject peace, etc., one should ask a simple question: What goes on in the Middle East when nothing goes on there at the direct politico-military level (i.e., when there are no tensions, attacks, negotiations)? On Israel's end, what goes on is the incessant slow work of taking the land from the Palestinians in the West Bank: the gradual strangling of the Palestinian economy, the parceling of their land, the building of new settlements, the pressure on farmers to make them abandon their land—all supported by a Kafkaesque network of legal regulations.

In *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*, Saree Makdis describes how, while the Israeli occupation of the West Bank is ultimately enforced by the armed forces, it is an “occupation by bureaucracy”: Its primary forms are application forms, title deeds, residency papers and other permits. It is with this micro-management of daily life that Israel secures its slow but steadfast expansion. One has to ask for a permit in order to live with one's family, to farm one's land, to dig a well, to

go to work, to school, to a hospital.

Though it has been largely ignored by the media, Israel is clearly engaged in a slow, invisible process—a kind of underground digging of the mole—gradually undermining the basis of Palestinian livelihood so that, one day, the world will awaken and realize that there is no more Palestinian West Bank, that the land is Palestinian-free, and that all we can do is accept it.

The story has been going on since 1949: While Israel accepts the peace conditions proposed by the international community, it anticipates that the peace plan will fail. While condemning the openly violent excesses of “illegal” settlements, the State of Israel promotes new “legal” West Bank settlements. A look at the changing map of East Jerusalem, where the Palestinians have been gradually encircled and their space sliced, tells it all. The map of the Palestinian West Bank already looks like a fragmented archipelago.

The condemnation of unsanctioned anti-Palestinian violence obfuscates the true

problem of state violence; the condemnation of illegal settlements obfuscates the illegality of the “legal” ones. Therein resides the two-facedness of the much-praised non-biased “honesty” of the Israeli Supreme Court: By way of occasionally passing a judgment in favor of the dispossessed Palestinians, proclaiming their eviction illegal, it guarantees the legality of the remaining majority of cases.

And, to avoid any kind of misunderstanding, taking all this into account in no way implies an “understanding” for inexcusable terrorist acts. On the contrary, it provides the only ground from which one can condemn the terrorist attacks without hypocrisy. ■

SLAVOJ ZIZEK, an *In These Times* contributing editor and a member of the *In These Times* Board of Editors, is a philosopher in Ljubljana, Slovenia. He is the international director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities in London.

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Chronically Displaced in NOLA

ON JULY 26, about 50 people lined up to testify before a United Nations advisory committee in the cafeteria of McDonogh 42, a New Orleans elementary school. Though there had been only a small notice in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* calling for public input, about 300 Hurricane Katrina survivors turned up to tell the UN-HABITAT advisors about the difficulties they still face returning to their ancestral homes even four years after the disaster. According to the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (GNOCDC), about a quarter of the city's pre-Katrina population—more than 175,000 people—has not returned.

Though many of their neighbors have given up and left town, the group gathered at McDonogh wants to remain in New Orleans because their families have lived here, as one person says, “since be-

dear ITT ideologist

Dear ITT Ideologist,

I was recently re-appointed to a top post at a leading private-public bank. However, after slipping on a clam shell on Martha's Vineyard, I forgot what I knew about the money. Could you explain the money to me.

B. Bernanke, Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. B.B., king of the moolah,

I'm happy to do it and wish you good fortune. Here in America we have two kinds of money. There's the money you work for. And there's the money that works for you.

A fellow pushing a broom is working for his money. A guy lying on a chaise lounge in the Caribbean with a BlackBerry in one mitt and a babe in the other has his money working for him.

Your job is to make sure that the broom pusher never has much money and the guy on the chaise always has more than enough. This is called business as usual.

Sometimes things go whacky, as when the guy on the chaise borrows so much

money to make money that he finds himself in the hole.

That's when you step in to lend him even more money so he can dig his way out. You get this money by borrowing it from guys lying on beaches along the South China Sea. If they don't want to lend it to you? Then you pull it out of your butt.

How do you pull money out of your butt? For that, you have to sign up for the advanced course.

Dear ITT Ideologist,

I'm an insult comic. I make a nice living calling people knuckleheads, turkeys and, for older, more literate audiences, hebetudinous roperipes. I also say things about their mothers.

I've recently noticed a trend towards ideological and geographical insults. People flock to political gatherings and sling slags like Nazi, socialist and Canadian at their elected solons. Everybody gets ticked and has lots of fun.



I'm thinking of joining the bandwagon and adding a few such words to my act. Do you think the trend will last? Or should I stick with knucklehead?
D. Rickles, Las Vegas, Nev.

Dear Mr. Poopie Drawers,

I've noticed the same trend. As an ideologist, I applaud the upsurge in the use of ideological

expressions. The one downside is that they're being misused by nitwits.

When people use ideas and foreign places as insults it's to make others think they're smart as well as snotty. So when you call Senator Specter a socialistic Canadian, he thinks you're brighter than someone who just called him an a-hole. But, then again, he probably wouldn't credit you for knowing the difference between Toronto and Trotsky.

I say stick with knucklehead.

—Pete Karman

FREEDOM OF THE INTERNET

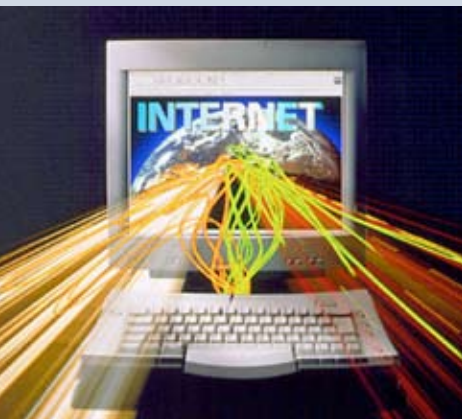
Like public education and guns, the Internet is, in theory, a great equalizer. For a moderate monthly fee—or a visit to the public library—users can communicate instantaneously, access a wealth of information and even post their own content to a forum or blog. One user's connection might be faster than another's, but all can access the same World Wide Web.

For Internet service providers (ISPs), however, this exceptionally high degree of democracy represents a missed opportunity for profit. They're unable to block competitors' content or anyone who posts things they don't like. If they were to institute a tiered service model—limiting access to certain websites and services to higher-paying users and businesses—ISPs might extract more money from customers.

To preserve "Net neutrality" and protect companies' ability to compete and innovate online, Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) introduced the Internet Freedom Preservation Act of 2009 in early August. The bill prohibits ISPs from blocking or discriminating against any Web content. It also requires them to disclose information about their service, including speed and limitations, and guarantees an FCC ruling on neutrality complaints within 90 days.

Visit Savetheinternet.com to sign a petition to Congress in support of the bill.

—Robin Peterson



fore the United States."

Over the course of three hours, the committee heard speakers ranging from rental property owners unable to access federal funds allocated for repairs to the working poor who can't afford the higher cost of the city's housing. This cross section is typical of the 7th Ward where the meeting took place, a two-square-mile Afro-Creole neighborhood where people of different incomes and ethnicities have historically lived as neighbors.

Those who came to the hearing hope the U.S. government will respond to U.N. pressure and recognize their right to return. They want Katrina survivors to be defined as internally displaced persons (IDPs), a term used by the U.N. and recognized by the U.S. government and other nations. According to the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, a nonprofit, labeling the hurricane survivors as IDPs would then give them access to "right to return" laws that mandate the provision of adequate housing, education, health, food and work.

The many obstacles to resettlement have routed the poor and middle class from the city's land, while more than 65,000 residences in Orleans Parish remain uninhabited, according to the GNOCDC. Blighted properties and those with unpaid taxes are now being taken over by the city, creating a no-win situation for the government and the average neighborhood citizen. Like Harlem before gentrification, the downtown communities with abandoned properties and empty lots will soon be ripe for developers—if they take an interest. Without a buyer, the properties may lie fallow for years.

Owners are pressed to raise rents due to the rising cost of insurance, taxes and city services, not to mention repairs. Rents are now 40 percent higher than pre-Katrina levels, according to a June 2009 report by the GNOCDC. As a result, low-income tenant subsidies are more necessary than ever. The Bureau of Governmental Research, a New Orleans nonprofit, predicts that subsidized housing will rise to 25 percent of all New Orleans housing in 2012, up from 10 percent of pre-Katrina housing stock. The



On May 13, Jalin Vasquez holds her sister Jayshel Barthelemy in the FEMA trailer park where they live in Port Sulphur, La.

questions residents ask is: Who will be subsidized most in post-Katrina New Orleans—the developers, the needy or the middle class?

With the help of federal dollars, builders are beginning massive new projects. On A.P. Tureaud Avenue, within walking distance of McDonogh, freshly built houses tower over their older neighbors. The St. Bernard Projects, the largest public-housing complex in the city, was torn down to make room for large developments. Some of the speakers at the UN-HABITAT meeting spoke of a conspiracy against the poor.

Canadian Leilani Farha, a representative of the U.N. advisory committee, told the group the issues were too complex to be solved overnight and that the visiting committee will give its findings to UN-HABITAT, which will forward them to the U.S. federal government.

One audience member testified that she needs immediate help. She came back to New Orleans to take care of her disabled parents, and now works as a truck driver. She detailed sexual harassment at work and domestic abuse in one of the places she lived after Katrina. "I want to die. Everybody is depressed," she told the committee. "What do you do? Where do you go? Do you kill yourself?"

A few people called back, "No. Don't do it." The rest sat silent.

—Fatima Shaik

Michelle Obama, How Does Your Garden Grow?

THE POTENTIAL PUBLIC health threat posed by the application of sewage sludge as fertilizer made news in June when lead levels of 93 parts per million (ppm) were reported in Michelle Obama's garden.

According to a February National Park Service soil analysis, the levels of arsenic, cadmium, mercury and lead on the White House South Lawn were all at levels deemed safe by the EPA.

Yet some public health experts maintain the EPA's current heavy-metal safety standards are outdated. What's more, the EPA sludge standards don't include other dangerous contaminants that lurk in sewage. A stew of new pharmaceuticals, personal care products and cleaning agents gush down drains daily, and are later processed through municipal treatment plants. The resulting sewage sludge, known euphemistically as "biosolids," is then applied as fertilizer to land.

Sewage sludge, under the brand name ComPRO, was last applied to the White House South Lawn in the mid '80s, according to D.C. Waste and Sewer Authority (DC WASA) Biosolids Manager Chris Peot.

More recently, the George W. Bush administration encouraged federal agencies and contractors to purchase recycled products, and in 2003 added "compost from biosolids" as a recommended product of the federal green purchasing program under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. Subsequently, much to the sludge industry's delight, 1,500 cubic yards of sludge was used in the 2004 conversion of Pennsylvania Avenue into a pedestrian mall.

The EPA sets the bar for heavy metal levels considered safe for gardens and contact with children. Yet the current one-size-fits-all lead standard doesn't account for the different bioavailability of various chemical forms of lead. According to David L. Johnson, a professor at the school of Environmental Science and For-

estry at the State University of New York in Syracuse, 93 ppm of lead acetate is very different from 93 ppm of lead chloropyromorphite, as the latter is more likely to be absorbed into an organism's circulation system. Neither the Park Service's White House South Lawn report nor EPA regulations account for these variables.

A number of potentially harmful non-metallic toxins commonly found in sewage sludge are not regulated by the EPA. The typical soil report tests only for some biological pathogens and heavy metals. "It's fair to say that EPA rules in general are out of date," says Murray McBride, director of the Cornell Waste Management Institute. What's more, EPA rules have failed to take into account the surface water runoff from sludge application sites. That runoff is thought to contribute to the sudden appearance of intersexed fish in the Potomac River.

EPA regulations on sewage sludge have collected dust since 1993, when current standards for sewage sludge disposal were first implemented. In 2001, the EPA revisited the standards for a biennial review required by the Clean Water Act, and concluded that no additional pollutants should be included. In 2002, the National Research Council's Committee on Toxicants and Pathogens in Biosolids Applied to Land report gingerly broached the subject of local outbreaks of sewage-sludge-induced illnesses, but fell shy of an actual judgment on the safety of biosolids usage. The report also found the EPA did not have a systematic way of documenting local complaints.

In response to the EPA's failure to take any action, in 2007 the Cornell Waste Management Institute compiled a matrix of reported incidents of illnesses near sewage sludge application sites, documenting a slew of symptoms ranging from nosebleeds and thyroid disorders to vomiting and cancer.

The EPA finally responded to the 2002 National Research Council's report and in January published the Targeted National Sewage Sludge Survey Report (TNSSSR), which covered sludge from 74 publicly-owned treatment works in 35 states. The EPA tested for and discovered in all samples additional metals, disinfectants, ste-

roids and flame retardants never before scrutinized as pollutants.

But recognition of potential risks on paper does not translate to action. "At this point, there's not enough known about each one of these microconstituents that are in there to allow major efforts right now in developing standards," says Alan



First Lady Michelle Obama harvests vegetables from the White House Kitchen Garden with students from Bancroft Elementary School on the South Lawn of the White House on June 16.

Rubin, the EPA's retired senior scientist and Chief of the Sludge Risk Assessment Branch in 1993, when the EPA first redefined sewage sludge as fertilizer.

The EPA refuses to release information about the progress of its deliberations and no decisions have been made on whether sludge will be more strictly regulated. For the rest of the year, the EPA will study the risks of certain sludge pollutants and their toxicity to humans and wildlife. Maybe standards will be written for some of those toxins. Maybe sewage plants will be required to implement extra treatments to bring down levels of certain pollutants. But what is certain is that the elimination of sewage sludge use as a "tried and true" fertilizer is not on the table at the EPA.

—Sisi Tang

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Supporters of ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya demonstrate in Tegucigalpa on August 28. The United States pressured Honduran coup leaders after they rejected a settlement, with plans in the works to cut off nearly \$150 million in U.S. assistance. (Photo by Orlando Sierra/AFP/Getty Images)

Canada Tightens Border

WHILE MEXICAN VISITORS have faced growing difficulty crossing U.S. borders, Canada has traditionally been more welcoming. Until this summer, that is. On July 13, the Canadian government announced that henceforth, citizens of Mexico and the Czech Republic could no longer enter Canada without a visa.

More than a quarter-million Mexicans visit Canada each year. Even if a Mexican or Czech citizen wants only to catch fish on an Alberta lake, visit relatives in Ontario or consult a Quebec client, he or she must now obtain a Temporary Resident Visa.

Imposition of the visa policy was a “function of the growing number of refugee claims,” says Guillermo Rishchynski, Canada’s Ambassador to Mexico. Illegitimate claims, he says, have become an “unsustainable burden.” Requiring visas was

“the only tool available to the government [as] a means of stemming the flood of refugee claims.”

Between 2005 and 2008, Mexican refugee claims grew from about 3,400 to more than 9,400. During those years, more than one-fourth of total claims were made by Mexicans, with nearly 90 percent rejected (versus 44 percent for other countries).

Some 40 percent of Mexican claims were dismissed, according to Rishchynski, and Canada covers the \$30,000 cost of evaluating potential refugees. “Canada has this judicial process for investigating claims, which is lengthy,” Rishchynski says.

During the two weeks prior to implementing the new policy, about 400 refugee claims were received from Mexican citizens. That number sank near 20 for the following two weeks.

Making visas mandatory lumped potential refugees—both legitimate and dubious—into the same group as persons seeking immigrant status and ordinary

visitors. Immediately after the policy was enacted, the Mexican government issued a statement deploring the decision. In retaliation, it announced the termination of a longstanding agreement that exempted Canadian diplomats and officials from Mexican visa requirements. The change will take effect on October 17.

Mexico City’s left-leaning paper *La Jornada* reported that Mexican officials knew about the forthcoming policy shift and proposed alternatives that were rejected by Canada. In August, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper met with Mexican President Felipe Calderon in Guadalajara. Harper blamed Canada’s refugee system for the change, noting that it “encourages bogus claims.”

Canadian law states that all visitors must obtain a Temporary Resident Visa, except for citizens of countries that have been granted an exemption. These include visitors from the United States, Japan, the EU (except Bulgaria, Romania and, now, the Czech Republic) and Japan, among others.

Canada issued some 20,000 visas to Mexicans between mid-July and late August. Applicants need a valid reason for visiting Canada, copies of travel documents and proof of sufficient funds. The visa officer must be convinced that the visit will be temporary, and that the person is in good health and has no criminal record.

Applications are accepted only in Mexico City, but documents may be submitted via a courier service.

Though early reaction was negative, official sources at the Mexican Foreign Affairs Ministry say “it would be adventurous to call it a furious reaction.” Indignation has arisen from inconvenienced travelers and rejected visa applicants, but “there have not been major consequences.” Following the discussion at the North American Leaders Summit, “the press has lowered its criticism,” the ministry added.

Unless Mexico and the Czech Republic regain their exemptions, citizens of those countries must plan ahead and hope their papers are in order. Even if an arriving traveler possesses a visa, the agent at the port of entry has final authority to deny admission.

—James M. Flammang

"I married a Madman!"

"I suspected it when I first met him. After 3 years of marriage, I know!

"Would a sane man call you up from his office occasionally just to say sweet nonsensical things? No! My husband does!

"And sometimes...right out in public, mind... he takes my hand and squeezes it and says how smooth it is in...well, our private baby talk!

"I've got Ivory Soap to thank for keeping him nice and crazy about my hands.

"To think I was almost resigned to having strong washday soap make my hands red 'n' rough! Goodness, I didn't know Ivory's velvet suds clean dishes fast as the strongest washday soaps!

"And was I pleased to see my hands whiter, smoother only 12 days after I changed to Ivory! Then I remembered...after all, Ivory is baby's beauty soap.

"Woman to woman...just change to 'Velvet-suds' Ivory for your dishes! Costs only about 1¢ a day, you know."...99⁴⁴/₁₀₀% pure...It floats.

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Mad Men 2.0

America is experiencing a PR revolution that promotes outraged denial over fact-based persuasion

BY DAVID SIROTA

IT'S DIFFICULT TO KNOW exactly why AMC's *Mad Men* has become such a hit, but it is a safe bet that its popularity is not merely a product of the television show's smooth writing, superb acting and retro-cool clothing. What has taken the program from *Law & Order*-watchable to *Sopranos*-style phenomenal is its exploration of advertising and public relations—the psychological manipulations that we're immersed in but rarely talk about.

In *Mad Men*'s early 1960s, the dark art of selling and spinning were being perfected and modernized. Before television, advertising was largely based on the repetition of anodyne fact—the theory being that if you simply hard-sell a product's virtues, ingredients and effects, that product will eventually fly off the shelves. In the

television age, as Americans became more media literate and thus cynical, vendors began using ad firms to sophisticate their pitches with subtlety and insinuation. Getting to watch that mercurial process via Sterling Cooper (the fictional ad agency in the show) is a voyeur's delight—like being allowed to watch David Copperfield construct his elaborate magic tricks.

Key to *Mad Men*'s formula is the assumption that viewers realize most media products have become, to one degree or another, propaganda. We get that gatekeepers with subjective interests—whether governments or corporations—will shape the information they provide so as to promote or protect those interests. Free television shows are accompanied by hypnotic advertisements, news broadcasts don't typically attack their sponsors and

governments omit official information that might damage the administration in power. A half-century into the information revolution, we grasp how all of those subjectivities conspire to influence us.

Not surprisingly, that mass psychological maturation is once again inspiring those with a vested interest in controlling information to develop new techniques. Thus, even as *Mad Men* grabs audience share with its potent retrospective on the original revolution in contemporary advertising, the business of information packaging is now experiencing a second revolution—a conversion to Mad Men 2.0. And this time, that business is following the worst lessons from its past.

Don Draper to Don Rumsfeld

In the last decade, America has wit-



Ralph Flanagan for Halo Shampoo, 1954

nessed the evolution of the head-pounding hard sell and brain-massaging soft pitch into what can be called “outraged denial.” Its key component is replacing spin—the artful highlighting of partial truths—with a total rejection of all facts.

This PR device is based on the theory that in a post-Watergate, post-Monicagate world, the public will view spinned parsings as admissions of guilt, yet accept enraged refutations as ineluctably true. Through decades of commercials, congressional testimony and political punditry, we’ve been taught to believe that institutions and individuals may evade and prevaricate, but they will never defend or promote themselves with brazen, up-is-down fabrications because they know such lies can be easily exposed.

Of course, this expectation of minimal honesty is precisely why we’re moving from the Don Draper zeitgeist to the Don Rumsfeld paradigm—that is, from finesse to outraged denial.

When a company’s safety standards or earnings reports are criticized, the corporate parent today inevitably denies all charges with gusto, knowing we have trouble believing an angry denial isn’t at least somewhat true. When a political figure is asked about sex with an intern or prior knowledge of a terrorist threat, he doesn’t acknowledge any of the verifiable facts—he angrily rejects the entire line of questioning as irresponsible conspiracy theory, knowing that we don’t want to believe he

could lie so brazenly.

Certainly, the Internet explosion and the proliferation of news outlets have made uncovering untruths easy. In theory, this should deter institutions and individuals from employing outraged denial. Yet the opposite is true.

Thanks to so many news sources fragmenting the audience, almost no single source is powerful enough to enforce empirical truths against outraged denial. Indeed, for every objective blog that fact-checks a congressperson’s statements, three partisan blogs defend that lawmakers’ fibs. For every reporter who uncovers discrepancies between a CEO’s public speech and his company’s SEC filings, five PR firms exist to “prove” no discrepancies exist.

Thus we find ourselves in a perverse situation: As information becomes easier to obtain and cynicism rises, outraged denial by the 21st-century Mad Men becomes more pervasive.

Today, Tea Party protestors vehemently deny that patients will be given a choice of insurance provider under universal healthcare proposals that statutorily preserve said choice; Washington Republicans deny that the wealthy pay lower effective tax rates than middle-income earners—even as IRS data proves just that; Democrats deny that a filibuster-proof majority in Congress means they have any power to pass legislation; and the banking industry denies any relationship between billions in taxpayer bailouts and billions in lavish executive bonuses.

Deception has always been part of public life. And today’s dishonesty might be tolerable if the press charged with policing the truth was not part of the problem.

As PBS’s Bill Moyers has documented, the early 2000s saw the national press corps aid and abet the Bush administration’s worst outraged denials after 9/11. When antiwar activists said the government was lying about Iraq intelligence, the White House’s indignant denials were amplified by nearly every corporate media outlet. When legal scholars insisted the president was violating the constitution with torture memos and warrantless wiretapping orders, again, the press corps largely echoed official brush-offs.

Indeed, if anything unifies the main-

stream media today, it is the principle of embracing outraged denials first and asking questions later—or not at all. And recent brouhahas suggest that the same media is intent on adopting this venal axiom for its own purposes.

The media-industrial complex

In 2003, PBS’s Charlie Rose repeated an oft-heard outraged denial about media objectivity. Responding to independent journalist Amy Goodman’s assertion that vertically integrated parent conglomerates now directly shape news decisions, Rose said, “I promise you, CBS News and ABC News and NBC News are not influenced by the corporations that may own those companies.” As evidence, he said, “I know one of [those companies] very well and worked for one of them.”

The Don Drapers of today were no doubt celebrating. Here was a trusted, seemingly impartial voice—on no less honorable a network than PBS—personally testifying to the objectivity of corporate media. It was advertising at its most subversive and mendacious.

Two years prior, NBC’s president publicly lobbied politicians against a government order forcing the company’s owner, General Electric, to clean up its PCB mess in the Hudson River—a move that raised questions about whether NBC could objectively cover one of the largest environmental disasters in American history. Similarly, eight years before Rose’s outraged denial, CBS News—the very network Rose bragged about working for—backed off a tobacco industry expose after pressure from its lawsuit-averse executives. The affair was such an emblematic example of corporate manipulation of the news that it became an Academy Award-nominated film, *The Insider*.

Fast forward to 2009. In a front-page story, the *New York Times* reported that the same Charlie Rose who denied any corporate influence on news decisions had brokered a deal in May between the CEOs of General Electric and the News Corporation to stop their respective news organizations, MSNBC and Fox News, from criticizing each other.

The inspiration for the detente was explicitly economic—not journalistic. Fox

News' Bill O'Reilly had been responding to criticism by MSNBC's Keith Olbermann with attacks on General Electric's business practices. According to the *Times*, the News Corporation felt its bottom line was threatened by Olbermann's continued attacks on its credibility, and General Electric felt similarly besieged by O'Reilly—and so the two corporations agreed to a ceasefire.

Even in the age of Mad Men 2.0, the story was a public embarrassment. Olbermann, whose show rose to prominence based on its persistent O'Reilly criticism, has ceased to question him in the two months since the agreement. Meanwhile, General Electric spokespeople were not only answering media inquiries about MSNBC news decisions, they were bragging about their heavy-handed tactics.

Yet, instead of acknowledging any of the facts, Olbermann proceeded with outraged denial. In his first broadcast after the *Times* story, the MSNBC anchor seethed that he was “party to no deal” and labeled the *Times* reporter, Brian Stetler, one of the “Worst Persons in the World.” Yet Olbermann never bothered to address the simple fact that General Electric's management had issued an order that he followed. In fact, just hours after his denial, Olbermann told Salon.com's Glenn Greenwald that he “found nothing materially factually inaccurate about” Greenwald's assertion that the whole affair was, indeed, an example of corporate control of the media.

“Olbermann's actions in this matter truly insult all of the viewers that look up to him as a non-coward voice in the media,” wrote Jason Linkins, who reports on media issues for *The Huffington Post*. “He is, quite simply, playing his viewers for fools.”

Just as Olbermann fought off the General Electric story, critics raised questions about why his show continued to promote Richard Wolffe as a disinterested “political analyst” at the same time Wolffe was a full-time PR consultant for Public Strategies, Inc.—a company whose clients have a financial stake in the very policy debates that are discussed on MSNBC.

When asked if Wolffe would be barred from appearing on the network because of the dual loyalties, MSNBC executives said absolutely not. They promised only to “dis-

close Richard's connection” in the future. (Olbermann, to his credit, later unilaterally said Wolffe would not be welcome on his show.) It was as if a lack of transparency—and not the glaring conflict of interest—was the major transgression.

Wolffe is one of many figures promoted as independent journalists while simultaneously being paid by decidedly non-inde-

A trusted, seemingly impartial voice—on no less honorable a network than PBS—testified to the objectivity of corporate media. It was advertising at its most subversive and mendacious.

pendent clients. In 2005, there was Doug Bandow, the Cato Institute scholar who was paid by Jack Abramoff's lobbying clients to write corporate-friendly op-eds under the guise of principled conservatism. The same year, “journalist” Armstrong Williams was exposed for pocketing \$241,000 in cash from the Bush administration to promote the White House's education agenda. That episode, of course, looked miniscule compared to the *New York Times* exposé uncovering financial connections between defense contractors and former generals who were appearing on television to promote the Iraq War.

Mind you, this isn't just a Bush-era phenomenon—it continues today. In August, CNN announced that Bill Schneider would be working both as its “political analyst” and as a paid operative with Third Way, one of Washington's most notorious corporate front groups. In recent weeks, executives at PR firm Burson-Marsteller were caught looking to drum up business from a company featured in a regular *Wall Street Journal* column that is written by Burson-Marsteller CEO Mark Penn.

In almost every instance, the canned response is outraged denial at any suggestion that media corruption is systemic and widespread rather than isolated and anomalous.

Who is curbing the watchdogs?

A democracy that permits outraged denial to turn truth into a subjective concept will not remain a democracy for long. It will become an Animal Farm run

by those with the biggest microphone, sharpest bayonet and maddest Mad Men. Preventing that devolution requires a true independent media—one free from corporate control and therefore free to aggressively police the truth.

The good news is that vibrant independent media is not a pipe dream. In an Internet Age whose cost of information

distribution is as close to free as it will ever get, outlets like Talking Points Memo, the Huffington Post and the blogosphere point to real potential.

The bad news is the status quo's incentive system.

Today's corporate, political and media landscapes actively encourage the current trajectory. Incumbent politicians who employ outraged denial to cover their lies rarely face electoral consequences—in fact, most of the time, there are electoral rewards. (One of many examples: Joe Lieberman winning re-election after pretending he was fighting to end the Iraq War). Same for the business world: The financial crisis shows that companies will be rewarded with taxpayer gifts when they lie and cheat their way to speculative disaster.

Inside the media, it's worse. As corporate outlets trim staff and rely more on low-paid freelancers, those freelancers are economically motivated to split time between nonpartisan journalism and PR consulting. This trend intensifies as media companies stop requiring any modicum of personal financial objectivity from their part-time help. What, for instance, would keep someone like Wolffe from selling himself to business clients when his media platform doesn't require him to preserve any shred of independence?

That question—and its obvious answer—illustrates just how much concepts like truth, fact and empiricism have already been eroded, and how far along Mad Men 2.0 already is. ■



The Rural Organizing Project organized a 7-day, 70-mile march from Salem to Portland to protest the wars at home and abroad.

Uniting, One County at a Time

We helped make rural Oregon a force for progressive change

BY MIKE EDERA AND MARCY WESTERLING

THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF Sarah Palin continues to dismay and amaze. How could this loser Vice-Presidential candidate and failed Alaska governor reach into the current debate on healthcare reform and, by inventing Obama's death panels—surely one of the most moronic, inane charges in U.S. political history—seem to tip the struggle for a public healthcare option in favor of the private insurance industry?

Watching the re-incarnation of Palin and listening to the increasingly shrill tone of the healthcare “debate,” many of us who are veterans of the ’90s culture wars hear a familiar sound. The Palin phenomenon is a synthetic version of the grassroots right-wing social movements that emerged in the ’80s and ’90s. Those movements were political products designed in the hothouses of various then-obscure right-wing institutions. But they had an authentic gestation in rural America.

Before she was discovered by William Kristol and launched into the national

limelight by the McCain campaign, Palin was mentored by wingnuts of the Alaska Independence Party, an offshoot of the U.S. Constitution Party. The movement of ideas and individuals from the right-wing fringe into mainstream politics—from grassroots to what might be termed the “small-town, rural brand”—is the reason progressives must pay attention to the politics of rural America.

The Sarah Palin soap opera shows the political power of this brand, which uses made-up “honest small-town values” to target a broad sector of the voting population, most of whom reside not in small towns but in the suburbs and exurbs that ring U.S. cities.

The politics of the small-town, rural brand includes the following:

- Don't be a smart-ass. Being knowledgeable about complicated policy matters just shows how elitist a politician is.
- Dressing up like a farmer/fisherman/hunter/rancher actually makes you one.

- In order to defend your 2nd Amendment rights, you can violate the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Amendment rights of others.
- America is a Christian nation. This means rooting for our side. The other team is made up of Muslim terrorists and other infidels.
- Christianity is all about being heterosexual and anti-abortion.
- Economic conservatism means that working people are too proud to accept a penny of government help and can keep their mouths shut as their rich and powerful betters help themselves to every public subsidy imaginable.

In the real world, people have very complex reasons for responding to a political initiative. The small-town, rural brand of politics has often prevailed because the opposition was barely present. Ninety percent of success is showing up, and in whole sections of rural and suburban America, a serious progressive politics has not existed for generations.

The leaders and structures that did step forward were marginalized from funding and strategic backing because progressive urban-centered organizations that controlled the purse strings viewed these attempts as lost causes. You can't beat something with nothing, and thus, for the last 40 years, an incoherent, demented style of politics has often won the day in

front row seat to observe the historical arc of rural-based right-wing social movements and the opportunity to develop an alternative that has shown resilience and promise. ROP developed in the early '90s as a response to the rise of a grassroots right wing in Oregon.

During the late '80s, rural Oregon's economic base imploded—the result of

political infrastructure and leadership core.

Because of the rural tilt of legislative districting in Oregon (and around the country), this infrastructure was used first to purge the Oregon Republican party of its traditional moderates, then to win a 12-year working majority in the Oregon legislature. In this period, while virtually none of the movement's social goals to restrict

Ninety percent of success is showing up. And in many parts of America, progressives have failed to present themselves, allowing a demented style of politics to define rural culture.

small towns and rural communities.

The politicians of the right run, almost exclusively, as “stealth candidates,”—short on program specifics, long on the rural small-town brand. Voters support candidates that claim to be pro-family, against ‘big government’ and taxes, and for self-help and local initiative. They never mention their support for de-funding public schools and libraries, building up fundamentalist Christian social institutions, allowing local corporations to run roughshod over workers and the very small towns they claim to love so much.

Progressives do not understand the critical role that grassroots right-wing movements have played in advancing policies that close the door on democratic participation. These movements mobilize fear of family disintegration into a political weapon deployed against the rights of women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered (LGBT) people, and racial and cultural minorities, all while working hand-in-hand with the economic right to advance policies that undermine the basis of economic fairness and a social safety net.

American politics in the '90s and the early years of this decade had its genesis in movements of resentment coming out of rural, small-town America. A politics that seeks to open society to participation for all people must have a base in these same rural communities.

The Rural Organizing Project

For the last 17 years, the Rural Organizing Project (ROP) in Oregon has had a

massive timber over-harvesting and new environmental regulations that sought to protect the last remaining stands of old-growth timber. Timber multinationals shifted operations to the southeastern United States, following an established game plan that treats whole regions of North America like a personal corn patch. Meanwhile, with the closing of sawmills and the shuttering of logging operations, small-town economies crashed throughout the Pacific Northwest. A dangerous vacuum in rural civil society opened up, and it was filled with the only viable non-governmental institution on the ground: socially conservative churches.

By the '90s, this socially conservative movement asserted itself politically. However, it did not make an economic argument in favor of resource extractive industries. Rather, it created a cultural critique of society that saw urban liberalism and the values it promulgated as a dangerous threat. Families that had been experiencing years of stress resulting from wrenching economic change were offered an explanation. The root of their problem was secular humanism, the “gay agenda” and feminism—all targets that seemed different, strange and immoral.

Beginning in 1992, social conservatives in Oregon launched a series of statewide and local ballot measures designed to limit the constitutional rights of LGBT people. This inaugurated a decade of bruising culture war battles. While most of these initiatives failed, they led to the creation of a powerful conservative po-

rights for gay people or overturn abortion laws were realized, a host of right-wing economic initiatives were achieved. The tax system was heavily weighted in favor of upper-income people and big property owners. Funding for public education and the social safety net was slashed. Oregon's pioneering effort to extend healthcare coverage was eviscerated. All these economic “reforms” fell hardest on the very people who formed the political base of the conservative movement, because rural Oregon counties remain the poorest parts of the state.

Mapping the rural left

Within rural Oregon communities, many residents were concerned and frightened by the emerging social conservatism. In 1992 Marcy Westerling (co-author of this article), with Suzanne Pharr and Scot Nakagawa, recruited volunteer teams with the support of many national and regional civil rights organizers. The Rural Organizing Project was founded through this solidarity organizing, although it would not name itself and create a formal organizational structure until 1993.

We worked initially through each county's domestic violence program to recruit a range of community members to attend consciousness-raising sessions in small towns across the state. Our methods were based on the practice of the feminist movement, using small-group living room discussions and the sharing of personal stories and experiences, but this time seeking to engage the entire community in a

discussion about democratic values.

The format allowed extended time for each person to explain why they were there, followed by a 15-minute connect-the-dots overview of the national right-wing movement—its funding, larger goals and how local ballot measures fit in to its long-term plans. The agenda then moved into facilitated discussion on how folks were observing this dynamic play out in their community. In the concluding 20 minutes, participants were asked to decide whether they wanted to create their own self-governed, community-based Human Dignity Group to anticipate and defuse the noise on the right. A next-day breakfast meeting often followed, allowing each new group to get down to the nuts and bolts.

Across the state, ROP created a network of Human Dignity Groups to give voice to progressives in conservative communities. We were able to do this through a process that is now known as “mapping”—listing, locating and contacting every civic organization we thought would share names of people who might be open to discussing inclusive democracy in their community. We began with the statewide network of women’s anti-violence resource centers located in each county. We worked with local faith communities or with local chambers

of commerce. Sometimes we were able to access the lists of small-town residents who supported urban-based progressive organizations. In every case, our success in pulling together Human Dignity Groups was based on a careful process of mapping out local civil society.

The Human Dignity Group model provided moral support and broke the isolation of individuals of conscience in communities visibly dominated by the Christian right. A menu of activities, from group letter-writing to public events, allowed groups to calibrate their level of activism. This work was done in the spirit of civil-rights legend Fannie Lou Hamer’s motto: “If everybody does something, no one will have to do everything.”

Advancing citizen democracy

Today, ROP works with 60 all-volunteer Human Dignity Groups in every Oregon county. ROP staffers help local groups to understand the basics of maintaining a political organization—how to run meetings, build a database and analyze issues.

ROP frames its work as pro-democracy organizing. It defines democracy as including the following points:

1. Majority rules.

2. Minority rights.
3. An adequate standard of living to allow all to participate.
4. Free and open exchange of information.

This model has proven effective in giving voice to progressives in communities that have not traditionally been open to dissent. It became a vehicle through which issues of gender justice, racial justice and economic justice could be expressed in the heart of the conservative political base.

By creating a model that facilitated the development of progressive political infrastructure in rural Oregon, we helped reverse the political gains of social conservatism. In 2007, the Oregon legislature tipped back into a moderate-progressive majority, after 12 years of conservative domination.

We are now living in a period of retrenchment for the social movements of the right. The Bush years, with the administration’s abuse of power and illegal wars, did great damage to the cause. The economic crash has temporarily discredited the free-market fundamentalism that was so effectively blended with religious fundamentalism to dominate politics for a generation. Yet, an immovable 25 percent of American voters still adheres to the small-town, rural brand of right-wing politics. Talking with these supporters, you hear that the Iraq war is a victory, Barack Obama is a Muslim socialist, the solution to economic meltdown is slashing government programs and, of course, that healthcare reform is a Stalinist project designed to unleash “death panels” on elderly America.

Combine this radically variant view of the facts with the timidity of the Democratic Party and its inability to confront a single entrenched interest—be it the financial establishment, the medical industry or the military-industrial-contractor-complex—and a resurgent right-wing is still a potent threat. Forestalling that development will require the creation of a genuine populist rural politics to replace a movement of social resentment with a movement for economic and social justice. ■

GET INVOLVED

Rural Organizing Project
www.rop.org



T.C. McKean, Marcy Westerling and Gretchen Ramos, of Columbia County Citizens for Human Dignity, with some of the 13,000 hand personalized postcards the group collected against an Oregon anti-immigrant ballot measure.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARCY WESTERLING

Building the Left in Harbor Country

We met our neighbors and helped turn rural Michigan blue

BY JIM VOPAT

6:30 P.M. HARBOR COUNTRY Progress (HCP), an all-volunteer, nonprofit, chartered club of the Michigan Democratic Party, is meeting in the village of Union Pier, Berrien County, Mich. To many of those assembled in the former art gallery on Red Arrow Highway, the Harbor Country office is a “historic” place. “Historic” because during the Obama campaign volunteers from little Union Pier (population 727) made more than 25,000 phone calls, registered more than 750 voters, canvassed more than 4,500 homes and had a 300-plus volunteer list. When Berrien County went blue and voted 40,376 for Obama and 36,128 for McCain, it was the first county-wide Democratic win since the 1964 Johnson/Goldwater election. (In 2004, Berrien County voted 41,076 for Bush and 32,846 for Kerry.)

In this post-election period, progressives in Harbor Country (defined as Michigan’s 6th congressional district, it includes miles of Lake Michigan lakefront) are enthusiastic and restive. The healthcare reform battle is being fought in Berrien County as it is across the nation and HCP is part of the fight. “Health Care Is a Right” t-shirts are for sale near the door, and a number of folks in the room are wearing them.

People have arrived early for the potluck—fresh asparagus, salads, pizzas, homemade breads, pasta primavera, spinach pie, baked chicken, wine, soda and a dessert table. The “food and wine thing,” as one member terms it, is one of the ways HCP achieves its community identity. It goes back to one of the earliest tenets of organizing—get social, eat each other’s food and have a good time.

Tonight people are gathered for a healthcare forum. Two local doctors will



Members of Harbor Country Progress hang the sign at their office on the Red Arrow Highway in Union Pier, Mich.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM VOPAT

talk about the benefits of a public option. HCP Chair Bob Miller asks everyone to introduce themselves and say where they are from. “Three Oaks,” “Sawyer,” “Grand Beach,” “Niles,” “Weesaw,” “Harbert,” “Lakeside,” “Galien,” “Bridgman,” “New Buffalo” and, of course, “Union Pier.” The roll call affirms that people are here from across rural southwest Michigan, that they represent more than themselves, that together they have and will continue to bring change to a historically Republican area. (Full disclosure: Miller is my partner.)

MoveOn roots

The seeds of Harbor Country Progress, which boasts more than 100 active members, are rooted in neighborhood meetings organized by MoveOn in 2005. “MoveOn suggested we invite neighbors

over to share some food and talk about issues that mattered to us,” Miller says. “We kept meeting monthly, sharing food and ideas and then planning political actions, like street protests against the war in Iraq.” The monthly MoveOn meetings attracted new participants soon outgrowing living rooms and kitchens. By the time the Democratic presidential primaries began in 2008, one of the members of the group closed her art gallery in Union Pier, Mich., and we decided to turn it into an office.

Having a physical space made it possible for the group to become a center for Barack Obama’s Campaign for Change. Frustrated by the lack of a real Democratic presidential primary in Michigan, members worked for Obama in the neighboring Indiana towns of South Bend and Michigan City—canvassing, phone bank-

ing and learning how to get out the vote. Once Obama became the Democratic candidate, members moved the strategies they had honed in Indiana to Michigan.

"People started showing up to volunteer," says Margarita Doerschner, the HCP office manager. "Someone out on Basswood Road came in and said, 'I've been living here for 45 years, and this is the first time anyone knocked on the door for a political candidate.'"

Post-election organizing

After the euphoria of Obama's victory, many wondered if the HCP office would have a future. "There was a feeling that we wanted to continue to support Obama's agenda, that he would need our support," says Miller. "And that we would need to hold him accountable if he didn't follow through."

After a series of meetings, the group chose Harbor Country Progress as its name. Its mission: "An informed and empowered electorate." To fulfill that mission, members decided that HCP

would become an official Democratic Party club and establish a Political Action Committee (PAC) that would continue to be part of Obama's grassroots network. To make it work, the group established the following three all-volunteer steering committees:

- *Political action:* For HCP, political action means coordination with Obama's Organizing for America, community forums, letters to the editor, and attendance at and reporting on relevant community meetings—from school board to township and village governance meetings. Having a regular representative at these public meetings helps keep HCP membership informed about important issues and decisions, and gives the group notice of impending committee vacancies. "We want to identify progressive candidates to run for or be appointed to open positions," says HCP political action chair Bonnie Kasten. Community forums have focused on the economic stimulus,

the Employee Free Choice Act and green energy initiatives. As part of its healthcare reform focus, HCP has organized a Health Care Is A Right rally at the office of Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.).

- *Community service:* This steering committee organizes and contributes to poverty relief projects in the 6th District, animal rescue efforts, and the distribution of trucks full of clothes and household goods to migrant families. One of HCP's most successful efforts involved planting organic seedlings in community gardens—Recovery Gardens—at three sites: the Benton Harbor Emergency Shelter, maintained and harvested by shelter residents; the New Buffalo (Mich.) Elementary School; and an open community space also in New Buffalo. As with other political and community programs, the community gardens brought new members into the group while informing people about the benefits of growing

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- **Membership and fundraising:** “The future is ours but we have to work for it,” says Doerschner, “and that’s particularly true for fundraising.” Although completely volunteer-based, HCP still needs to meet monthly operational expenses of \$1,500 and fund political action and community service initiatives. HCP also wants to provide resources for progressive candidates to run for political office throughout the 6th District. Money comes from selling political art, buttons, stickers, jewelry and t-shirts, passing the hat at forums and meetings, annual membership dues, “better than rummage” sales, raffles and donations.

In the membership/fundraising area, HCP’s juried art shows have been particularly successful. HCP’s first art show, “It’s Obama Time,” included artwork from HCP members, as well as more than 40 regional and national artists—both insider and outsider. (See Art Space, page 33.) “Obama inspires a lot of people to make art—not just professional artists,” says Sara Scherberg, one of the curators.

The art shows serve to strengthen the connections between individual artists in the group, and they attract other artists to HCP.

After Francisco Cuadra of Hammond, Ind., was laid off from his factory job and lost his home to foreclosure, he started painting portraits of Obama in politically charged settings. “The only way I could control myself was to pick up my brushes,” Cuadra told a local reporter.

Lessons learned

Interviews with our friends in HCP suggest a five-point consensus about what’s been learned and where we are headed:

1. **Build community.** Whether it is the potluck dinners or people introducing themselves and where they live at the start of each meeting, building a sense of community is central to HCP’s success. When people have a personal connection with and understand each other as individuals, they not only work better together, they also listen to each other more carefully and more empathically.

2. **Bridge political divides.** Providing quality affordable healthcare, donating household necessities for the local migrant population, and supporting local agriculture and clean energy initiatives are issues that appeal to and energize people across the political spectrum. “Instead of wedge issues, we look for community

Not everyone likes to canvass or make phone calls, staff the office, ask for donations, attend local meetings, write letters to the editor, make buttons or enter data—but someone does.

issues that bring people together,” Miller says. “It isn’t just Democrats who want clean energy.”

3. **Develop a list of leadership and volunteer opportunities.** Not everyone likes to canvass or make phone calls, staff the office, ask for donations, attend local meetings, write letters to the editor, make political buttons or enter data—but someone does. The volunteer philosophy of HCP is that people are productive and enthusiastic when they are doing what they want to do. Identify expertise and tap into it.
4. **Create a visible presence.** This includes having a good place to meet and work, an inviting website and a weekly newsletter, in our case e-mailed to a list of 1,200. Organizing programs and events generate positive media coverage. More than 4,000 postcards for the “It’s Obama Time” art show were distributed throughout the Harbor Country area. The front of the postcard was one of the pieces from our show, a color photo of a Obama sign made out of wooden letters at a rural intersection (the image featured on the cover of this *In These Times* issue). One of the group’s proudest achievements during the Obama campaign was arranging for two large Obama/Biden billboards—one on Highway 12 and one on Red Arrow Highway.)
5. **Continue with what works.** “People

want to volunteer on a political campaign, and they’re thinking driving voters to the polls. And we’re thinking going door to door and phone banking,” says Kasten. One-on-one contact through canvassing and phone banking were the ways HCP helped turn Berrien County blue for Obama. The same strategies are

just as successful on the local level. In a recent Three Oaks Township Trustee election, HCP backed the only candidate against landfill expansion, a candidate who proudly identified as a Democrat in an area where many Democrats running for office don’t draw attention to their party affiliation. Through phone banking, letters to the editor, handing out fliers and canvassing, this Democrat won in a landslide, creating the first Democratic majority on the Three Oaks township board anyone can remember.

9:00 P.M. The meeting is over. Chairs have been collapsed and stored in the back room. Pockets of people are still talking, holding their empty potluck dishes. Obscure as it may be in Union Pier, Harbor Country Progress shows the change that is possible across rural America. Progressives have formed community and achieved political success. Instead of taking off their boots and lying down for a long nap, we are energized and ready to continue the fight of our lifetime. “As Union Pier goes,” says Miller, “so goes the nation.”

The last cars pull out of the HCP parking area and drive away, lighting up the sign “Harbor Country Progress” along Red Arrow Highway. ■

GET INVOLVED

Harbor Country Progress
www.HarborCountryProgress.com

Don't Frack with Our Water!

Natural gas drilling threatens public health and the environment

BY POLLY HOWELLS

AS THE RUSH to locate new reserves of diminishing domestic fossil fuels intensifies, gas companies have returned to the scene where America's Industrial Revolution began 150 years ago: the oil fields of western Pennsylvania.

The problem is that the so-called natural gas these companies extract is not as accessible as that original oil was: It is embedded 6,000 to 9,000 feet beneath the earth in a rock stratum 50- to 100-feet thick known as the Marcellus Shale. Laid down during the Devonian geologic period—350 to 400 million years ago—the Marcellus Shale runs from Ohio and West Virginia east through Pennsylvania, the southern tier of New York and the Catskill Mountains.

The gas companies have developed a controversial extraction process known as hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as hydrofracking, or fracking. Using this technique, they can penetrate the depths of the Marcellus Shale and extract methane gas. Arguments over the economic benefits of this method and its environmental costs have bitterly divided many communities in New York, a state still in the process of developing its stance toward gas developers.

Fracking well

To frack one well, the gas company pumps in 3 to 9 million gallons of water at extremely high pressure. The water, mixed with chemicals and sand, travels vertically through a pipe and then is forced horizontally into the black shale layer. These fracking fluids—the exact ingredients of which the companies won't divulge, saying they are a trade secret—are necessary to keep the sand in suspension, so that when the shale cracks—the goal of the process—the



sand particles can wedge open the faults, enabling the drillers to extract the embedded methane gas.

As recently as 2002, the gas reserves in the Marcellus Shale were estimated at 1.9 trillion cubic feet. In 2008, geologists recalculated the Marcellus resource at 500 trillion cubic feet, 10 percent of which was deemed recoverable by these new hydraulic fracturing methods. That would be enough to supply two years' worth of the entire U.S. demand for natural gas, with a wellhead value of \$1 trillion. After receiving this news, the oil and gas corporations rushed to convince those who own land over the Marcellus shale to lease their mineral rights. The price offered per acre has jumped from \$200 to \$3,500 in some

cases, with promised potential royalties reaching hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

The stakes are high. But so are the dangers, as war stories emerge from the states where fracking is in common use. According to the companies, the chemically treated "frack fluids" can be retrieved and treated in safe storage tanks—but generally they are left in open, contaminated ponds.

Consider the following stories, among hundreds, of the environmental problems that have resulted from hydrofracked gas wells.

In April 2009, in northwest Louisiana, 17 cattle died within an hour after drinking "frac" water that had entered

their pasture. The Chesapeake Energy Company admitted its pipes had leaked “salt water” into the field, but did not acknowledge that its lethal “trade secret” chemicals were dissolved in the water. In a tacit admission of guilt, the company compensated the farmer for his losses.

In Garfield County, Colo., Laura Amos, a wife and mother, contracted a rare adrenal disease, primary hyper-aldoosteronism. Two years earlier, gas company EnCana hydrofractured a gas well less than 1,000 feet from her house that accidentally connected with her water well and “blew it up.” She says her well erupted “like a geyser,” and the water in her house became gray, bubbly, smelly and tested positive for methane. The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission assured her that this amount of dissolved methane was “transient” and perfectly safe.

A year after her mysterious diagnosis, she discovered the research of zoologist Theo Colburn, who has examined the chemicals in water around hydrofracked wells and identified one of the ingredients in the fracking fluids as 2-butoxyethanol (2-BE), a compound that can stay in the ground for years and easily leach into groundwater. Among the many diseases it can cause are malignant and non-malignant tumors of the adrenal gland, which is what Laura Amos had. Colburn, the president of the Endocrine Disruption Exchange, (www.endocrinedisruption.com), has become an indispensable source for those suspecting toxic health effects from nearby gas wells.

In the Fort Worth, Texas area, hydrofracking has resulted in more than a dozen small earthquakes since October 2008. This August, the Chesapeake Energy Corporation admitted complicity in the quakes, claiming they are not connected to the drilling or fracturing processes, but that there is a “possible correlation” between the quakes and a saltwater disposal well on the southern end of Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. The airport sits atop a fault line.

The Halliburton Loophole

Texas has more natural gas wells than any state in the union—76,436, to be exact. Texas-based Halliburton is a company that

has been involved in the hydrofracking business since it pioneered the technology back in the 1940s. Halliburton is one of three companies that has patented—and kept secret—the chemicals in the fracking fluids. In 2005, when former Halliburton CEO Dick Cheney was vice president, Congress passed the Energy Policy Act, which exempted the oil and gas companies

rock layer will release radioactive elements into the air. The short-term economic gain—all the wells will be emptied within the next 20 years—measured against the long-term losses of life and habitat make accelerating large-scale gas extraction ill-advised. What’s more, the rush to suck all remaining fossil fuels out of the earth delays any concerted effort to transition to

In 2005, when former Halliburton CEO Dick Cheney was vice president, Congress passed the Halliburton Loophole—a law exempting oil and gas companies from the Safe Drinking Water Act.

from having to abide by the provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act, in place since the 1970s. This bill has come to be known as the Halliburton Loophole.

In October 2008, Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.), Rep. John Salazar (D-Colo.) and Rep. Maurice Hinchey (D-N.Y.) introduced legislation to close the Halliburton Loophole. In June 2009, two additional bills, known as the FRAC Act, were introduced in Congress—H.R. 2766, sponsored by DeGette and Hinchey, and S. 1215, sponsored by Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.) and Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.)—to demand that the gas companies reveal the chemicals in their fracking fluids. The gas and oil companies are responding with claims that the present state regulations (in most cases nonexistent) are adequate, and that the costs of federal regulation would cripple their businesses.

In addition to the toxicity of the fracking fluids, other environmental issues concern residents of the towns in which these wells will be drilled: the draining of local aquifers to provide the water that the companies pump into the wells; the wear and tear on local roads as heavy trucks make thousands of trips to deliver this water; noise pollution from the pumps operating 24/7 for months at a time; the clearing of forests—each drilling pad demands about five acres of cleared land—that sacrifices forever natural spaces that people and other species so desperately need. Moreover, since the Marcellus Shale is known to be radioactive, it is likely that drilling into this

sustainable sources of energy.

As New York is one of five U.S. cities that is not mandated to filter its tap water, the potential danger of unregulated drilling to its drinking water is obvious. But it remains an issue under the radar for most New Yorkers. In August of 2008, New York City officials asked the state Department of Environmental Protection to forbid gas drilling closer than a mile from each of the city’s six major Catskill reservoirs, creating a buffer zone that would put at least half a million acres off-limits to drilling. Other cities and towns in New York State are calling for similar protections.

One small victory for regulation occurred in May 2009, when the Delaware River Basin Commission, representing four states and the federal government, ruled that energy companies must obtain its approval before beginning further extraction in the Delaware River basin. With a sympathetic administration in Washington, one hopes that this is the beginning of a new level of regulation for natural gas extraction nationwide. ■

GET INVOLVED:

Grassroots groups working to limit drilling in the Marcellus Shale:
www.damascuscitizens.org, www.shaleshock.org, www.nyh2o.org

A Fort Worth group:
www.FWCanDo.org.

A film is being developed about the nationwide natural gas/water situation:
www.waterunderattack.com.

Taking It to the Streets

Vendors battle bureaucracy for their place in the Second City

BY ROBIN PETERSON

WHEN AMERICANS GO SHOPPING or out to eat, they generally head for a store or a restaurant. But in many parts of the world, including some U.S. neighborhoods, the first place people go for food and other necessities is to the street. From kebab stands to open-air flea markets, street vendors offer consumers a cheap, convenient alternative to storefront businesses. For vendors, the work is a flexible, efficient and, at times, off-the-record way to earn cash.

But in the highly regulated modern city, hawking food or socks on the sidewalk is seen as subversive. Strict health codes and licensing requirements leave many vendors trapped in legal limbo. In Chicago, for instance, the only available city-wide vending license prohibits the sale of food that is cooked or sliced. This forces the city's legions of *tamale*, *paleta* (popsicle) and *elote* (roasted corn) vendors to operate outside the law and risk fines of up to \$1,000.

Jose Tafoya has received three fines of \$250 for selling tamales, *elote* (hot chocolate) and *elotes* from his cart on 26th Street, a bustling commercial district in Chicago's Mexican-American neighborhood of Little Village. As the owner of a small construction company with a family of four, Tafoya says street vending is a way "to make money to live"—an extra job on the weekends and during the winter, when construction work is scarce.

Last year, Tafoya saw a sign on the wall of a grocery store advertising the Asociación de Vendedores Ambulantes (AVA—Street Vendors Association). Formed in response to a 1993 police crackdown on Little Village vendors, the AVA has fought—thus far unsuccessfully—to pass an ordinance that would enable Chicago vendors to sell cooked food legally.

"It's difficult because there's no one out



Rogelio Gutierrez, a licensed street vendor, drives two and a half hours every morning from his home in Benton Harbor, Mich., to sell produce in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood.

there to help us politically," says Tafoya, who joined the AVA and now serves as its vice president. To try to amass some clout, the organization has been meeting with the chambers of commerce of 18th, 26th and 47th Streets—all centers of vendor activity. The group has also met with three aldermen in the hope that one of them will sponsor a favorable ordinance.

"The Street Vendors Association does not want the police to just tolerate them," says Martin Unzueta, head of Chicago Worker and Community Rights, which has been working with the AVA for the past year. "We want to sell and be in good standing with the city." To this end, Unzueta says, he's been helping the vendors get the only city license that exists for them—to sell whole fruit and vegetables—as well as take a food sanitation class and register in the state as small

businesses so that they can pay taxes.

Who owns the street?

Some opposition to the vendors comes from storefront businesses that resent what they see as unfair competition. "They say we are hurting 26th Street restaurants because we sell *elote* and *tamales* in the morning," Unzueta says. "But we sell only from 5 to 10 a.m., and the restaurants open at 10 a.m." Unzueta believes, as do many researchers, that vendors serve a different customer base than the restaurants. "There's no comparison between *elotes* and dinner," he says.

Alfonso Morales, a sociology professor at the University of Madison-Wisconsin and co-founder of the Openair Market Network, says, "Storefront business will be skeptical of vendors. Then they'll see the vendor typically brings more foot traffic.

The two will learn to get along because the business is better for everybody.”

Besides small storefront businesses, there are larger forces at work in city policy, often with interests that conflict with the vendors. “The biggest source of shut-downs is that there is some developer who wants to invest, to build upper-scale housing in the area,” says Steve Balkin, an economics professor at Roosevelt University and co-founder of the Openair Market Network with Morales. “When a developer says, ‘I want you, alderman, to get rid of these vendors if I’m going to invest money here,’ the alderman calls the health department and says, ‘Check on these vendors.’”

Second City syndrome

Chicago didn’t always persecute its street vendors. Back in 1912, a city ordinance created the Maxwell Street Market, where licensed peddlers could sell their goods seven days of the week. The area became a thriving commercial hub, attracting low-income and minority entrepreneurs, many of them recent immigrants. “What I saw in the Maxwell Street Market was a hotbed of entrepreneurial micro-capitalism,” Balkin says. “I saw poor people with very little skills who were able to start little businesses at the market and generate some extra income. Eventually some were able to go off and start substantial businesses.”

In 1994, over the protests of vendors and preservationists, Mayor Richard M. Daley chose to demolish Maxwell Street to accommodate an expansion of the University of Illinois-Chicago campus. The market was moved several blocks away and now takes place only on Sundays. “The mayor didn’t want street vendors anywhere near the Loop,” Balkin says. “The Loop and places near it are to be an extension of bourgeois suburban America.”

But for many people, including Balkin, street vendors are part of a city’s appeal. “I think one of the hallmarks of a world-class city is that they have an exciting street life,” he says.

Even New York, which presents itself as a world-class city, makes it difficult to negotiate the street vendor license system, according to Sean Basinski, founder of the Street Vendor Project, an organi-

zation of NYC-based vendors. New York City has capped the number of licenses it issues, giving rise to a booming black market in them, and its courts address 59,000 vending-related cases every year. “The rules are very difficult to understand, and usually have nothing to do with health and safety,” he says. “There are powerful organizations who want to control how the sidewalk works—usually businesses or real-estate interests.”

A free market?

“I see two competing forms of freedom in our country,” says Mark Weinberg, an attorney and former vendor who has defended panhandlers, street vendors and street performers against the City of Chicago. “There’s the technocratic, bureaucratic notion of freedom, in which government controls the public space, which is comforting to people because it guarantees there will never be any surprises. The other kind of freedom is more spontaneous and anarchic—it says the public space is for everybody. I think it cuts deep to the type of society we want to live in.”

Viewed through this dichotomy, a street vendor license is an ambiguous benefit. “If they’re legalized, the city will know about each one, and they can add extra regulations to put them out of business,” Balkin says.

Regulated or not, street vending is integral to many cultures, and it’s unlikely to disappear anytime soon. “In Mexico, vendors sell tamales and *elotes* in front of businesses, and they never have problems,” Tafoya says. As long as Chicago is an immigrant destination, the city that birthed Maxwell Street Market will be a home to vendors as well.

As Morales points out, “more and more cities across the United States are embracing public markets—as tools of economic development, as a source of food security—for a lot of the same reasons cities used public markets as policy tools 100 years ago.” ■

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BY GEORGE KENNEY

The Frontier of Consciousness

It's safe to assume that psychic phenomena have been with us since the dawn of humankind. Indeed, it's not unreasonable to speculate that certain forms of these phenomena—for example, a sense of the incorporeal presence of others—are somehow hardwired into our DNA. But the

sixty-four-thousand-dollar question is whether science can adequately explain the apparently inexplicable.

In her sympathetic book *Unbelievable: Investigations into Ghosts, Poltergeists, Telepathy, and Other Unseen Phenomena, from the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory* (Ecco, 2009), Stacy Horn assesses one of the most systematic scientific efforts ever taken to research the paranormal. And she concludes, against her wishes, it seems, that the phenomena are real. They remain, nevertheless, a mystery.

If in fact unknown, unseen forces really are at work, then either our scientific understanding of the natural world suffers huge gaps or our understanding may, in certain fundamental respects, be wrong. Or both. That's good news for people who relish a challenge but not such good news for scientists heavily vested in contemporary paradigms. Small wonder that psychic phenomena get short shrift from the establishment.

Still, if something can be measured, if it can be shown to exist, it must be explainable. As we get closer to opening a door into a very different world, two questions arise. What will it mean if we succeed in harnessing the power of telepathy or psychokinesis or remote viewing or other psychic phenomena? And if we do so, to what extent will we continue to rely upon intuition and faith in addressing the larger issues of life and death?

How did writing this book change your thoughts of the paranormal?

When I started out I was a complete skeptic. But after researching the experiments at the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory during the '30s, '40s and '50s, I changed my mind. In his book *The Scalpel and the Soul*, Allan Hamilton has a line, "It is easy to say you don't believe in ghosts when you haven't seen one."

As you point out, J.B. Rhine, the director of the former Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke, is really a tragic figure.

Yeah, towards the end he was just not open to a lot of experiments that could have really taken the research further. What was ultimately tragic about Rhine was that over and over his lab would come up with evidence for these effects, which he chose to call "telepathy" and "psychokinesis," but he was never able to learn how it operated. He could never control it or enhance it or anything.

There's also Robert Jahn, from PEAR [Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research] laboratory and the work he did on remote viewing.

Jahn had this lab for roughly the same amount of time as Rhine, and he did more modern versions of basically the same experiments, but using computers. And he got pretty much the same results. He showed that people have these abili-

ties, but not to superhuman levels.

Jahn says that he got interested in this when an undergraduate came to him with a project to see how mental efforts might influence electronic chips. And, as an engineer, he said, "Well this is impossible, but go ahead and try it." When she showed some positive results, he thought, "Well, this is important because if we've got chips running everything, and they are susceptible to mental influences, what is that going to mean for us?" And he started doing the research himself.

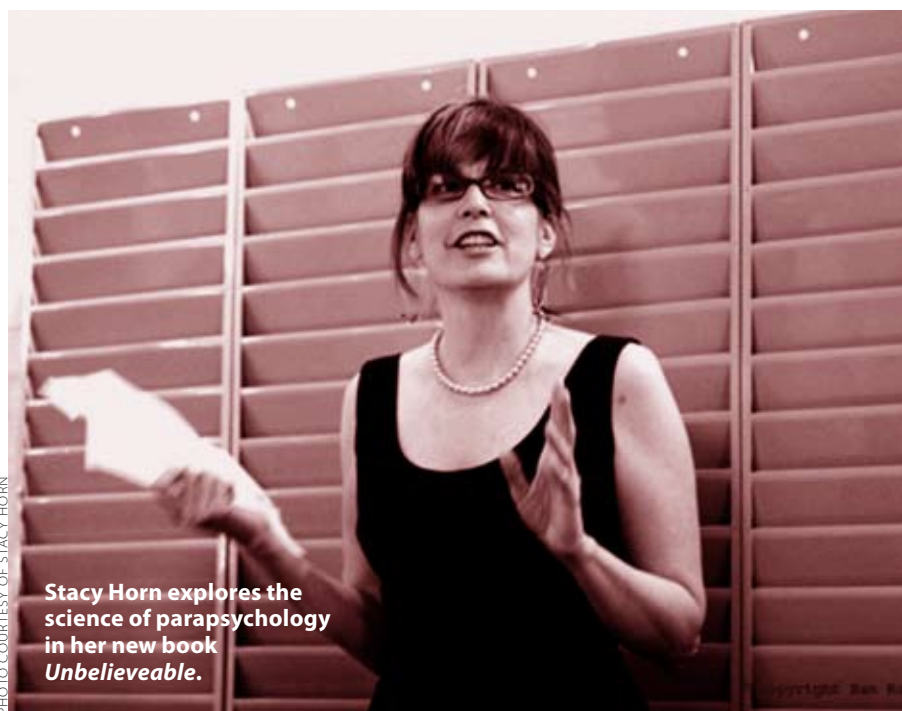
He published his results and he was subject to the same scorn that Rhine was his entire life. And he retired, with his work still not accepted, the same as Rhine.

In 2007, Jahn and Brenda Dunne, his colleague from PEAR, wrote "Change the Rules!" What was that article about?

They basically say that we have these field theories for gravitation and electromagnetism and that we need to incorporate a field theory for information, and that information propagates in the world the same way electromagnetism does or gravity does and we have to come up with an information field to explain and understand this.

You are also writing about the unwillingness of the scientific community to entertain ideas that are radically at odds with established views.

People do not want to drop their complete worldview for a new idea just like that. When I first started researching this book, I had the most naive idea of scientists. I thought that they were very rational, much more rational than I was. But when I started reading these letters to Rhine in the Duke archive from these scientists all over the world, just dripping with venom, I was shocked. But of course, they're only human. And humans



Stacy Horn explores the science of parapsychology in her new book *Unbelievable*.

get nasty and snarky.

Let's talk about poltergeists. Once you accept the possibility that humans, in whatever way, are a conduit for energy that is making stuff fly around, then you get interest from people in the military. Were you curious about the military investigation into these things?

When I was down at Duke, I copied a lot of letters between Rhine and people in various branches of the military. In Rhine's time period, the military wasn't ready to make a full-blown effort into this area, at least not that I was able to find out about, but they were always curious. And then there were the CIA remote viewing experiments that the CIA said were exciting, but I wasn't able to find where they went from there.

In *Unbelievable* you mention the University of Virginia's department of psychiatry's Division of Perceptual Studies, and their research on reincarnation. About six months ago or so, I approached Bruce Grayson, who now runs that program, and he sent a very polite letter back saying that he was sorry he couldn't do an interview because he was under some sort of gag order. Were you interested in their work with children?

That's exactly what I was focusing on—and definitely, like the Rhine work, there

is something there that needs to be explained, regardless of how you interpret it.

The question is whether children's knowledge of other circumstances outside their particular lives could be attributed to some form of ESP as opposed to some form of reincarnation. That seems to be a difficult nut to crack.

Yes, but that doesn't explain the cases where the children had information that no one in the room knew, that their families didn't know, and even the families of the person they were said to have been reincarnated as didn't know—information that the kids provided which turned out to be true. So if it was coming from someone else's mind, whose was it?

The conclusion that I came to in my book was that it seems there is another source of information out there—I don't know where it is coming from. I don't know if it is coming from the dead or from other people's minds. But there is adequate evidence that people have ways of knowing things that we cannot explain.

When Rhine retired, his lab closed down.

Yeah. In both Rhine's and Jahn's cases. When Rhine retired, Duke closed down the lab. But he knew that was going to happen so he opened another lab outside of Duke, the Rhine Research Center. And

Jahn, when Princeton closed PEAR down, he opened up the International Consciousness Research Laboratories.

Is there anyone today comparable to those two—an energetic person in the middle of a productive career who's trying to tackle these problems?

Things are percolating. There's the University of Virginia's Division of Perceptual Studies, which we talked about, and there's the Institute of Noetic Sciences in Petaluma, Calif. When I first started researching for this book, I couldn't find anything from any mainstream scientist that even had like a tiny window into acceptance.

I have this great quote from Allan Hamilton, the author of the *The Scalpel and the Soul*: "There are a lot more unseen forces in the universe than we have access to now." And Michio Kaku—he's a well known theoretical physicist—wrote *Physics of the Impossible* where he goes through telepathy, psychokinesis and time travel, and he discusses whether they violate the laws of physics as we know them today. And for both telepathy and psychokinesis, he concludes that they do not violate the laws of physics, and are at least theoretically possible.

Then there's Andrei Linde, the astrophysicist from Stanford, who said, "Is it possible that consciousness, like space-time, has its own intrinsic degrees of freedom, and that neglecting these will lead to a description of the universe that is fundamentally incomplete?"

What does he mean by "its own intrinsic degrees of freedom"?

Linde is saying that consciousness may somehow operate independently of us. Like it doesn't depend on us, it doesn't depend on the brain. There's a relationship, but it's not a physical one, it's not part of our body.

Consciousness does seem to be the new frontier.

You think?

Yeah. You don't? ■

GEORGE KENNEY, a member of the *In These Times* Board of Editors, is a former career U.S. foreign service officer. He resigned in 1991 over U.S. Policy toward the Yugoslav conflict. This exchange was adapted from a podcast interview on *ElectricPolitics.com*.



JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

BY DAVID MOBERG

The Retail Devolution

The success of Wal-Mart is in many ways paradoxical. The world's biggest corporation—and one of the most technologically sophisticated—emerged from the poor, rural backwaters of Arkansas, a state regularly at the bottom of

most state achievement rankings. Increasingly global in procurement and sales, it grew from a base that was racially homogenous—a result of the violent expulsion of African-Americans—and suspicious of all outsiders. A company that plays on “family values” is based in a region with one of the highest divorce rates in the United States. A region of low-income families adhering to a range of anti-materialist Protestant faiths gives birth to this colossus of consumerism. And the list goes on.

But as a business, it does a lot of things right, even if the social consequences are often wrong. Now, adding valuable new analyses to a growing literature

on a company both deeply loved and passionately hated, two historians offer distinctive, if overlapping, accounts of what Sam Walton hath wrought. Both books are essential reading for understanding not just Wal-Mart, but also America's general political and economic trajectory.

Nelson Lichtenstein, as indicated by his book's title—*The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business* (Metropolitan, July)—focuses on how Wal-Mart's revolution in retail has transformed business more broadly and possibly created the paradigmatic corporation for the “post-industrial” economy, as General Motors did in the

decades after World War II.

By contrast, in *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Harvard, May), Bethany Moreton concentrates on the cultural revolution—or counter-revolution—that Wal-Mart fostered yet also opportunistically exploited. Wal-Mart's patriarchal but service-oriented and religiously-tinged corporate culture not only helped it thrive in its home territory. It also gave the company an edge in exploiting the nation's growing inequality and economic insecurity and in capitalizing on the Southernization of American politics and the rise of the Republican right.

Wal-Mart fostered both revolutions, sometimes not as a fully thought-out strategy, by shrewdly taking advantage of ideas generated by others—from the discount store model to bar codes—and by converting what seemed to be drawbacks and obstacles into opportunities. Much of Wal-Mart's innovative success comes from its single-minded, even ruthless pursuit of some of these adopted ideas and, ultimately, from the advantages it gained from its great size.

But as it advanced economic and cultural revolutions, Wal-Mart was also nurtured by independent changes in business and society.

Frustrated by corporate constraints on his dime store operations, Sam Walton launched his chain of discount stores in 1962, a time when discounters like New York's E.J. Korvette inspired the creation of new chains, including K-Mart, Woolco and Target. Although Arkansas had been a center of populist opposition to chain stores as a foreign threat, Walton defined his chain as local. He recognized the potential buying power in rural communities, swollen with retirees benefiting from the New Deal (from social security to local lake development, as Moreton notes). He built a distribution center with his own truck fleet (since local transportation was underdeveloped), then filled in stores throughout a day's driving radius. Then he expanded the pattern in ever more regions.

Wal-Mart at heart was an increasingly

efficient distribution company, Lichtenstein writes, and an information company, not a traditional retailer. It promoted bar codes early and used information systems to track products from point-of-sale to vendors. It minimized inventory. It also accumulated sales information to

of Wal-Mart owes much to the conservative Protestantism of the Ozarks that had developed a reverence for both God and the "free market." Walton recreated in his stores, Moreton argues, a version of the patriarchal farm family, with a largely female sales force and largely male man-

The company created 'Wal-Mart country' as home not just for poor rural whites but for all the working-class families that have been increasingly stressed financially since the 1970s.

gain leverage in its tough negotiations for cheaper prices from suppliers. These vendors, like Procter & Gamble, previously enjoyed the upper hand but increasingly partnered with or became subordinate to Wal-Mart. The company seized power from the manufacturers, Lichtenstein notes, revolutionizing not only retail, but the whole economy.

Walton also gained competitive advantage by keeping labor costs low and unions out, following a union-buster's advice to either fight his employees or get them on his side—and he did both as needed. He also was a relatively early big importer from Asia, despite his Buy American marketing. That strategy took off when Wal-Mart established its own buying office in China, subjecting producers there to the same demands for special treatment and ever lower prices.

One of the ways Walton tried to get employees—and customers—on his side was through the creation of what Moreton describes as conservative Christian "corporate populism". Wal-Mart's defanged populism had none of the original Populist bite against big corporate power, but retained its resentment of all that was foreign. The company created "Wal-Mart country" as home not just for poor rural whites of Arkansas but for all the working-class families that have been increasingly stressed financially since the 1970s—Wal-Mart's "golden decade."

Walton himself was a mainstream Presbyterian, but the corporate culture

of Wal-Mart owes much to the conservative Protestantism of the Ozarks that had developed a reverence for both God and the "free market." Walton recreated in his stores, Moreton argues, a version of the patriarchal farm family, with a largely female sales force and largely male man-

agement—a pattern now the subject of a giant class-action lawsuit. The company promoted the model of the "servant leader," adopted by many conservative churches, for those managers, even though the ideal of leading by serving often conflicted with the harsh methods used by Wal-Mart managers, including kindly old Mr. Sam, the father figure of Wal-Mart country. Female clerks saw themselves as serving the needs of families rather than promoting Godless consumerism.

Wal-Mart recruited store managers heavily from local Christian colleges, encouraging their programs of education in free-market fundamentalism—groups like Students In Free Enterprise—and other efforts to spread the linked gospels of Christianity and free markets. Wal-Mart supercenters and evangelical megachurches grew in tandem, and their hardcore constituents tended to vote Republican and trust more in God and Wal-Mart to solve their problems than in government and unions.

Moreton says this is not just a result of corporate manipulation and credits Wal-Mart's women employees with shaping the corporate culture. But she also provides ample evidence of manipulation. Where the softer cultural strategy failed, she and Lichtenstein both show how hard Wal-Mart is willing to crack down. Moreton relies heavily on the testimony of Wal-Mart loyalists, who play a crucial role in the company. But half Wal-Mart's

workforce turns over annually, many voting—if not in a union election—with their feet to express discontent.

No doubt Wal-Mart's conservative Christian corporate populism has played a big part in its success. But Wal-Mart also triumphed because of its cheap products, efficient distribution, mastery of information, anti-unionism and ability to dictate terms to vendors. But would it have become such a powerhouse if inequality had not grown so dramatically or if conservatives had not so demonized government, often with coded racial messages? Moreton's work is important for understanding conservative and anti-union tendencies in America's working class.

Will Wal-Mart's model continue to work? As it spreads throughout the country, it meets widespread resistance. Its overseas ventures post mixed results. Its competitors are adopting its techniques. The cultural and demographic base on which it was built is shrinking as a portion of the U.S. population.

How could higher energy prices or Internet shopping affect its future? What changes might unionization bring? How would Wal-Mart fare in a United States with a more broad-based prosperity? The work of historians Lichtenstein and Moreton can't answer those questions, but Wal-Mart's current reign may not last forever (just look at General Motors). Yet, for years to come, it will remain a major force shaping the global economy—another reason these two excellent books are well worth reading. ■

FILM

Gay Boys in Oil City

By Gary Barlow

FORTY YEARS AGO, the Stonewall Riots sparked a revolution in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) rights in the United States. Since then, gays and lesbians have seen laws passed across the country protecting their right to work, to associate freely and live where they want, and even, in



C.J. Bills unintentionally came out when defending a harrassed classmate. After that, he says, each day in high school became “eight hours of pure hell,” so he dropped out.

some places, to marry. Coinciding with those transformations, gays created huge urban communities to openly celebrate their lives, with New York's Greenwich Village, Chicago's Boystown, San Francisco's Castro and similar neighborhoods around the country becoming meccas of queer culture.

The progress has been remarkable, to the point that one of the primary arguments anti-gay activists use against non-discrimination laws is that gays and lesbians are no longer a disadvantaged minority. The anti-GLBT crowd relies on this argument because they are aware that in this age of gay celebrities and corporate-endorsed pride parades, it seems on the surface to be true. It is not, of course, and *Out in the Silence*, a new documentary by Joe Wilson and Dean Hamer, brings home that point in a complex 57-minute portrait of GLBT lives and issues in small-town America.

The film takes place in Oil City, Pa., a Rust Belt town in the rough hill country north of Pittsburgh. It is Wilson's hometown, a place he left after high school. Although he and Hamer lived in Washington, D.C., after they got

married in Canada in 2004, they decided to publish a wedding announcement in the Oil City *Derrick*, which led to an onslaught of negative letters to the editor in the paper.

But then Wilson received a letter from Kathy Springer, the mother of an Oil City student who had faced unrelenting harassment in the town's high school. Her gay son, C.J. Bills, was forced to drop out and enroll in an online GED program because every school day had become, in his words, “eight hours of pure hell.” The letter spurred Wilson, accompanied by Hamer, to return to Oil City to see if there was a story to tell. There was, and then some. *Out in the Silence* details the ultimately successful battle of Bills and Springer, with help from the ACLU, to get the local school board to implement comprehensive diversity training. It also documents the efforts of a lesbian couple there to re-open a landmark Art Deco theater and Wilson's own realization that stereotypes work both ways.

About as mainstream as a small-town boy can be, Bills works on old cars, tends his family's game birds and jokes around with friends. But after he came out—not

as a political statement but in a heated moment defending another harassed boy—he came face to face with anti-gay prejudice and the tacit endorsement of it by teachers who turned a blind eye. Springer, who describes herself as “just a little old back hills mom,” was incensed enough to fight for her son and other GLBT students.

At the same time, lesbian partners Roxanne Hitchcock and Linda Henderson were refurbishing the long-closed Latonia Theater. Unlike Wilson, they had stayed in Oil City and found each other. Their story, as they face down prejudice to open the Latonia and win community acceptance, is also compelling stuff, and worth a film of its own.

The most intriguing part of *Out in the Silence* may be Wilson’s meeting of hearts, if not minds, with Pastor Mark Micklos, a Christian minister in Oil City. The two men, with their spouses, approached each other warily, and they do not end up

agreeing on GLBT issues by the film’s end. But they do become good friends and win each other’s respect and trust.

That’s a powerful thing to watch, and says much about where the fight for GLBT rights is in America today and about where it may well end. Despite the progress lesbians and gays have made since Stonewall, the movement still struggles to bring change to the thousands of small towns that make up the bulk of the country. It just isn’t enough to tell kids in those places that, if you make it through the hell of growing up gay and alone in a small town, you can escape and live in a big city paradise.

Out in the Silence points to a different future, one where GLBT folks can stay home and do small-town things like bring an old community landmark back to life, go to school board meetings and help kids grow up a little better, even sit and chat and become friends not because you share ideology, but simply because when everybody

in town is your neighbor, you need to find ways to get to know each other. That’s not an easy journey, but *Out in the Silence* is a thoughtful film that shows “small-town” doesn’t have to mean small-minded, and in doing so offers a vision of a better world for LGBT people everywhere. ■

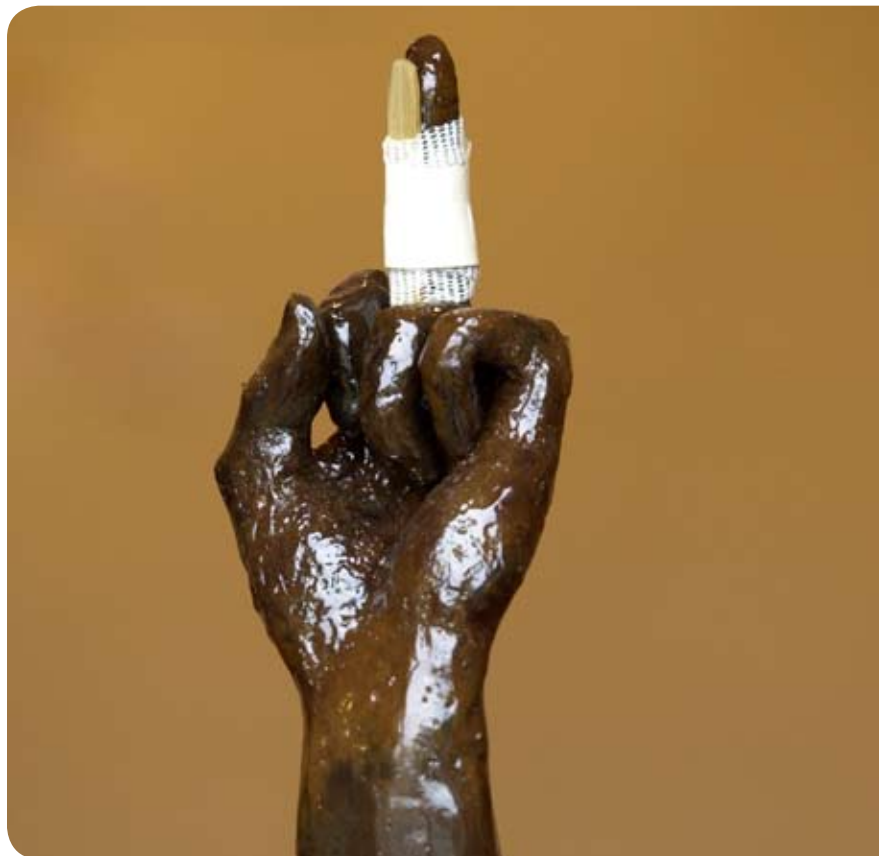
GARY BARLOW, a Chicago-based writer, grew up in Petal, Miss. He is a former managing editor and staff reporter for the Chicago Free Press, the Dallas Voice and Windy City Times. In the 1990s, he helped organize campaigns that defeated anti-gay ballot initiatives in Florida and Idaho, and worked on environmental and HIV/AIDS issues.

GET INVOLVED

The *Out in the Silence* Community Engagement Campaign expands awareness about the struggles GLBT people face in rural and small town America, and promotes dialogue and action in communities around the country to help strengthen the struggle for fairness and equality for all.

Find out more at: OutintheSilence.com

[art space]



%@#& YOU!

At an art gallery in Berrien County, Mich., Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) is a popular subject for artistic creativity. Local artists painted, sculpted and photographed the issues revolving around America’s healthcare conundrum, creating the pieces featured in a healthcare-themed art show sponsored by Harbor Country Progress. (See story on page 21). Steve LaGuttata’s sculpture “Thank You Max Baucus,” shown here, juts out like a sore thumb—er, middle finger—with its bandaged digit portraying the attitude of some, like Baucus, toward publicly financed healthcare.

“Some people feel that everybody should take care of their own healthcare,” says LaGuttata, “as a result, they’re saying this to us as a community.” And he gives the finger.

For more information, visit www.harborcountryprogress.com.

—Sisi Tang



The following excerpt from Kerry Noble's *Tabernacle of Hate* is included in *A Kingdom At Any Cost: Right-Wing Visions of Apocalypse in America* (October 2009, Parkhurst Brothers), edited by Michael W. Wilson and Natalie Zimmerman.

John Todd identified himself as a former member of an organization called the Council of 13, supposedly the witchcraft innermost circle of the organizers for a one-world government. He introduced us to terms like the Illuminati, the Bilderbergers, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission, the Federal Reserve System and the International Bankers, all of whom he claimed were involved in a worldwide conspiracy to rule the world for the devil.

The Illuminati were supposedly aided by top-ranking government officials, corporate leaders, new media, scientists, movie and television personalities, recording artists and religious leaders, all of whom were supposedly deeply involved with witchcraft. Todd mentioned these "conspirators" by name.

The plan, according to Todd, included enacting federal gun laws, removing tax exemptions from churches, instituting martial law in the country after some planned catastrophe (such as an oil crisis) and starting World War III, the last planned war to bring about a one-world government. ...

Christians would need to protect themselves defensively with weapons against the riotous criminals in society. Todd said we need guns. ...

As a society and as individuals, we typically fear what we do not understand. ...



The Jews, he said, controlled the money and the politicians; the Blacks were destroying the cities with their ghettos and welfare status... the Mexicans and Cubans were forcing America to adopt a second language.

No one, however, really sets out wanting to hate. The problem is most people don't want to examine their fears or belief systems in a positive, enlightened, introspective manner. Hate, anger and paranoia are simply easier.

dominant mode, further reinforced by the success of industrial capitalism. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels observed in *The Communist Manifesto*, the modern world was built largely through "the subjection of Nature's forces to man."

This subjection was so complete it eclipsed humankind's past and, with it, the traditional unity between humans and the rest of creation that is typical of premodern societies. Among Native American tribes, for example, animal species were, like other tribes, deemed "nations," such as the buffalo nation or beaver nation.

The premodern cosmos possessed a kind of enchantment. Humans were never alone: The crane flying overhead, the ground beneath one's feet, the great oak tree near the creek, the creek itself, could all be addressed as kin by those who knew the right words and rituals.

Modernity, as has been widely noted, drained the cosmos of that magic. In Max Weber's formulation, the West's elevation of "rational empirical knowledge" led to the "disenchantment of the world and its transformation into a causal mechanism." Radical and utter isolation followed. Carl Jung, a contemporary of Weber, grasped that loneliness had tragic implications: "Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos. He is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional participation in natural events, which hitherto had symbolic meaning for him."

Yet, the idea of the human world as separate from the rest of nature never gained complete acceptance. A few mavericks and romantics have always seen such isolation as wrong in substance and unbearable in spirit. Over generations, they repeatedly fought back, launching waves of protest, both cultural and political.

A rapidly dying world

The current wave of spiritual interest in nature is not simply another outburst of romanticism. For one thing, it is fueled by a new sense of urgency.

In 2005, the United Nations released the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*, the result of a five-year study of the world's environment involving some 1,360 scientists. In its executive summary, "Living Beyond Our Means: Natural Assets and

Enchantment

Continued from back page

ers. People began speaking up for the dignity of ordinary domestic animals such as cows and pigs.

How are we to understand this upsurge of feeling? To some degree, it can be considered a product of contemporary environmentalism. But the spreading influence of the environmental movement only partially explains the last two decades' fundamental change of consciousness. No political movement or platform can account for the intensity of feeling expressed by those who long to rediscover and embrace nature's mystery and grandeur, who expe-

rience an attachment to animals and places so overwhelming that they feel morally compelled to protect them, and who look to nature for psychic regeneration and renewal. More than an ideology, this quest for connection indicates a fundamental rejection of the most basic premises of modern thought and society.

Those premises center on a view of nature as inert matter, void of spirit and consciousness. For an early scientist like René Descartes, writing in the first half of the 17TH century, animals were simply unfeeling machines, incapable of emotions or pain. As the accomplishments of science earned it increasing prestige, this utilitarian view of nature became the

Human Well-Being,” the report’s authors write, “Human activity is putting such strain on the natural functions of Earth that the ability of the planet’s ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted.”

Global warming looms ominously, with the climate changing faster than anything seen since the end of the last ice age some 10,000 years ago. The rapid rise in temperature is endangering countless animals. People converted more forests and prairies to cropland from 1950 to 1980 than in the century and a half between 1700 and 1850. The destruction of habitat leaves animals with nowhere to go. The report’s authors conclude: “Some 12 percent of birds, 25 percent of mammals, and at least 32 percent of amphibians are threatened with extinction over the next century.”

The assessment reads like a funeral oratory.

A new covenant takes shape

Funerary rhetoric marks what is irretrievably gone, but it also reveals a people’s fundamental moral values—what the deceased meant to those still living, and what their hopes are for the future. In a growing public acknowledgment of kinship, laments for the deceased are now given on behalf of wild animals and places of all kinds. Such oratory serves as a reveille, a call to make amends for creatures’ wrongful deaths by acting to save those who are still left: Outlaw lead bullets, so the few remaining California condors won’t die from lead poisoning when they eat carcasses left by hunters. Urgently study the mysterious deaths of whales. Put the U.S. Navy’s testing of powerful sonar systems under stringent government regulation.

Increasingly, for every funeral story or call for action there is also a tale of resurrection and renewal. Searches for “ghost” species, for instance, are holy pilgrimages, mythic quests to bring back life from death’s grasp. If one near-extinct creature can be restored to a healthy population, then possibly others can, too.

When researchers announced in 2005 that they had videotaped an ivory-billed woodpecker in a forested Arkansas swamp, the first sighting since 1944, government agencies and the Nature Conser-

vancy bought more forested river-bottom lands near the location of the sighting to increase the bird’s chances for survival.

The response to the sighting shows a new covenant between society and nature taking shape. As novelist and bird-watcher Jonathan Rosen commented, the return of the ivorybill offers hope: “It somehow suggests that we have found more than just a

may be used by people, it is not to be exploited or perceived as a mere resource for human consumption. The culture of enchantment, then, alters the fundamental meanings that the West has given the natural world and imagines a new covenant between people, land and creatures.

The implications of this shift are enormous. If 400-year-old oak trees in Los

The culture of enchantment flatly rejects modernity’s reduction of animals, plants, places and natural forces to a utilitarian resource, and attempts to make nature sacred once again.

missing bird and that God, whom we invoked when we conquered the wilderness, is also present in our effort to get it back.”

Time for a strategic offensive

The current change in environmental thinking is much broader, deeper, and more varied than what has come before. Virtually every part of contemporary culture, from the highest realms of science to the mundane world of commercial television programming, has experienced its revolutionary influence. Already, mainstream geneticists openly discuss the idea of human-animal kinship.

The ultimate goal of this sweeping change, which I call “the culture of enchantment,” is nothing less than the reinvestment of nature with spirit. Flatly rejecting modernity’s reduction of animals, plants, places, and natural forces to either matter or utilitarian resource, the culture of enchantment attempts to make nature sacred once again.

People respond to the culture of enchantment because it offers them something they need (and cannot find elsewhere in consumerist America): transcendence—a sense of mystery and meaning, glimpses of a numinous world beyond our own. The spiritual connections made to animals and landscapes almost invariably lead to a new relationship to nature in general. And nature perceived as “sacred” is allowed to exist on its own terms, for its own sake, valuable simply because it is there.

For nature to retain its mystery, it must retain its autonomy: While its products

Angeles can be reenchanting, whole forests or entire mountain ranges or coastlines might come to command our love and respect. Even degraded and polluted landscapes—the kind often found in and around cities—might gain our compassion and be deemed worthy of care. In creating spiritual and moral reasons for reconceiving man’s relation to nature, the culture of enchantment challenges modern institutions, raising standards that few, if any, can now meet.

The momentum behind this cultural transformation suggests that anyone who cares about the Earth should take heart. It has opened people’s imaginations, and in doing so changed the political climate.

The environmental movement and its allies can now shift their strategy from defense to offense. Such an offensive strategy will require a proactive agenda for environmental reform, one in which unambiguous legal mandates against drilling in ANWR and constructing roads in national forests are only the beginning.

The struggle for enchantment is a crucial part of the larger struggle over the kind of culture and society humanity will have.

The reenchantment of nature—if coupled with political courage to act—offers a chance to remake the world. ■

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The Politics of Enchantment

The quest for a new kinship with nature might just save us

BY JAMES WILLIAM GIBSON

LIKE SPECIAL FORCES COMMANDOS, the L.A. County Sheriff's deputies and firefighters came at 2 a.m., Jan. 10, 2002, when they knew their enemy would be asleep. After a 71-day siege, the lone warrior knew the end was coming and chained himself into place for one last stand.

Mesmerized, the public watched the arrest of a tree-sitter, who was charged with trespassing. For just over two months, 42-year-old John Quigley, a well-known local environmentalist, had lived amid the boughs of a 400-year-old oak tree, trying to save it from a developer's bulldozer.

The oak stood at the entrance to a new subdivision of several hundred homes in the Santa Clarita Valley, north of Los Angeles. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors had ruled that the tree had to go because it blocked the planned expansion of a two-lane road into a four-lane thoroughfare.

The media loved the story. Parents brought their children to bear witness. Native American groups drummed and danced in

solidarity. As posters, poems and tributes collected at its base, the oak started to resemble a monument or memorial.

To millions living in the suburban sprawl of Southern California, the grand old oak had become far more than a tree—it had become a symbol of all the other trees, animal life and open spaces lost to development.

Desires for place and the animal Other

Through the 1990s and early 2000s, a new and striking kind of yearning was evident in the ways ordinary people felt and talked about nature. People were touched by stories of bears who befriended humans, enthralled by the fluid grace of whales, moved to the depths of their souls by majestic trees, newly alive to the sense of mystery, of a world larger than themselves. Some suburban residents came to feel deeply connected to the few remaining open spaces—slivers of forest, wetland, meadow—around them, dedicating years to trying to save them from development. Others restored degraded places such as polluted wetlands and riv-

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